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We the 48th

United States Army

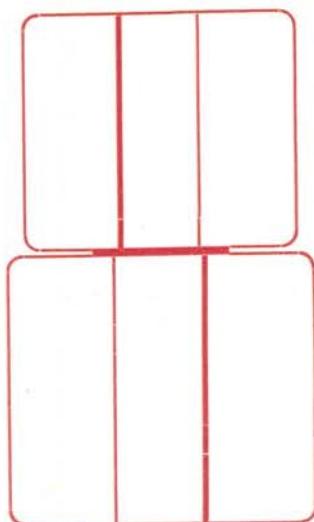
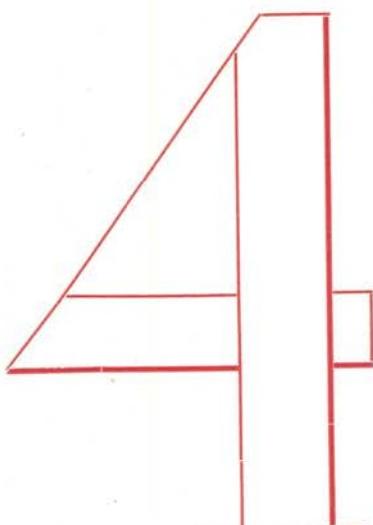
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WE THE



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DEDICATION

WE THE 48th ENGINEERS DEDICATE NOT THIS BOOK, BUT THE MEMORIES THAT IT INSPIRES. WE DEDICATE THEM TO THE MEN AMONG US WHO HAVE FALLEN AND TO THE REASON WHY THEY FELL.

MAY THE UNDERSTANDING OF OUR DEAD AND THE FORCE OF THESE MEMORIES DRIVE US TOWARD THE ULTIMATE GOAL THAT ALL FREE MEN, LIVING AND WORKING TOGETHER, WILL NEVER AGAIN PERMIT ANOTHER WAR.

PROLOGUE

There isn't too much difference between a good outfit and just another one that does its routine job in its own routine way.

It isn't the draft board, army selection, or luck; it's just a happy circumstance when certain men are chosen as officers and others for enlisted men -- and it's even a happier circumstance when they click into a well geared machine.

But an outfit isn't a machine either. It's a group of 600 individual personalities who are thinking 600 different ways towards getting the job done.

It's the 600 different ways of thinking that makes an outfit good.

It's the American soldier with his self-initiative, imagination, intelligence and ability. It's the American officer with his leadership and knowledge, and it's the American field commander with his patience and restraint--that makes a good outfit.

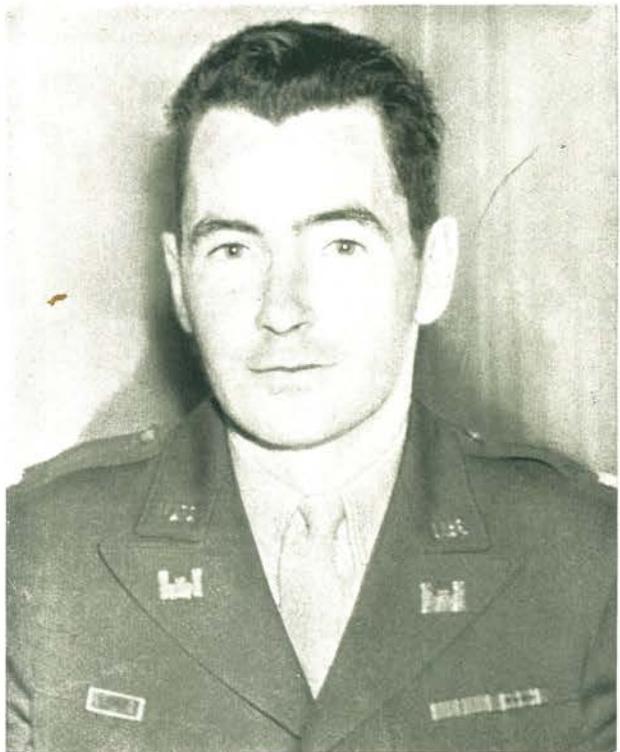
We, the men of the 48th Engineers, want to tell you the story of our outfit -- the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion.

Signed,

THE STAFF



Lt. Colonel Andrew J. Goodpaster



*Bn. C. O.
Lt. Colonel Joseph E. Foley*



*Former C. O.
Lt. Colonel Dean E. Swift*



*Former C. O. 1108th Engr (C) Group
Colonel K. S. Andersson*



*Former Commanders
Lt. Colonel Mc Carthy, Major Winger, Major Fullerton*

*Exec. Officer
Major O. O. Munson*



"OPEN THE WAY"

Open the Way is a symbolic study in pastels of the route of the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion. The view opens with the ocean leading to Africa. The sand of Africa leads to Italy featured by the long stay of the 48th below Montecassino. To the left of the mountain is the great goal of the Fifth Army in Italy, the arches of Rome. The trail of the 48th moves across water to the famous Red Beach at St. Raphael where the 48th landed in Southern France. The Battalion continued through France to Germany symbolized by the view of the Heidelberg castle at top left and the bridge across the Neckar River in the center of the rock arch. The massive rock dominates the entire painting with the impression of the great obstacles which have confronted the 48th Engineers, and the hewn arch in the center provides the thought that the 48th has driven through the greatest of hardship to "Open the Way".

PICK AND SHOVEL MAN

»*Pick and Shovel man.*« That's all you are. You're a Joe that knows the stinging pain that knots your legs and cramps your back. You know the driving rain that soaks you through and through and chills you till your stomach feels like a chunk of ice. You know the bouncing hail that beats a rhumba rhythm on your helmet until it drives you almost mad. You know the endless, drifting formless white of snow, and the jagged heat waves on the bubbling black asphalt of the road . . . the swirling dust of a passing convoy as each truck kicks dirt in your face until you want to scream.

You know the cold clear hours of early morning, and the dark, quiet hours of deep night. You know the sodden, clammy heat of mid-day and the silent stillness of midnight.

You know the thrill of mountaintops and the restful quiet of the valley.

You know the sweet smell of clover and new mown hay, and the decaying, festering odor of a shell-seared town.

You have sensed the dreamy sleepiness of a lonely town, and felt your blood rush hot in a roaring, flaming city.

You know well that sickening sensation when a shell comes in. Your brain is numb, your stomach is cold, and you grovel in the dirt as a shell whistles, roars, fizzles and cracks with the roar of thunder.

You know the emptiness of defeat and the enthusiasm of victory.

Engineer? You have rode recon with a squad truck as your tank. You have spent two months in a hole with an M-I as your bazooka. You have been M.P.s in Augsburg, Quartermaster in St. Raphael, Ordnance at Epinal, Cavalry at Terracina, Infantry in Ludweiler

You have planted your bridges across the Volturno, the Rapido, the Rhone, and the Saar. You have opened the way to Cassino, Velletri, Terracina, and Spigno.

You took Mt. Porchia and St. Die, and you haven't lost yet.

You fought your way across four nations to plant your standard on Hitler's doorstep on Victory Day in Berchtesgaden.

»*Pick and Shovel man?*« - Soldier, you're a COMBAT ENGINEER!

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We The 48th Staff

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**WE THANK T/SCT GOODMAN, LT FAHRENGER, SGT RUSSELL, SGT. SCHRAB,
SGT. VALENTINE, SGT. GRAVES, SGT SARANIERO, SGT. NASH, AND ALL OTHER MEN
OF THE 48th ENGINEERS.**

CHAPTER I

THE OLD COUNTRY

It was July and it was hot. The brown dust hung suspended over the road until a passing automobile would swirl more dust upward and outward, leaving an ever-expanding trail in its wake. It was the Black Hills country of Oklahoma, but this particular spot seemed out of place. It was a high plateau and the brown dust trails over the roads lay flat as far as the horizon miles away. There were no hills here. The plain was monotonously flat, for although Nature had decided to give this part of the country a range of hills, somehow, she had made the job incomplete, and a high level plateau that gave a false impression of plains country was the result.

Because it was high, it was dry, and because it was dry a group of men standing patiently by the dusty road alternately brushed perspiration and dust from their faces. The men were old soldiers and they didn't complain, but their uniforms were shapeless masses that clung to them, and the brown dust settled into every fold. In all, there were 52 lieutenants, 20 fresh from OCS at Belvoir, and 107 noncoms of all types. The noncoms were lately from the crack 20th Engineers of Blanding, Florida, and had left two days ago for a secret job at a secret camp somewhere in Oklahoma. The two days on the lurching train made them tired. Now the long wait in the wilting sun completed the job, and the men were feeling just about as miserable as they could possibly feel.

The fresh new rows of white barracks looked inviting for the men, and they were wondering what sort of confusion was holding up their fate, and why they couldn't get to where they were going and get some sleep. There weren't many soldiers in the area for there were only about one thousand in the whole camp. The Administration buildings were buzzing with things to come, but the men to make the Army post were lacking. The only things on that flat plateau were the neat orderly rows of new barracks, the American flag flying from the big pole, several dusty trails, and a group of tired men waiting for orders.

Soldiers kept moving between the buildings carrying sheafs of papers, and finally one harried sergeant with more papers than anyone else walked up to the waiting men. "Let's go, men," he said.

They walked carefully past piles of lumber and through dusty paths that led across the empty spaces between the neat white rows of new buildings. The place smelled clean, like all new buildings. There was the pungent smell of new tarpaper and the chalky-smell of new cement. Sand piles lay at every corner and discarded small pieces of lumber lay where the carpenters had thrown them.

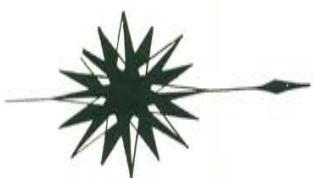
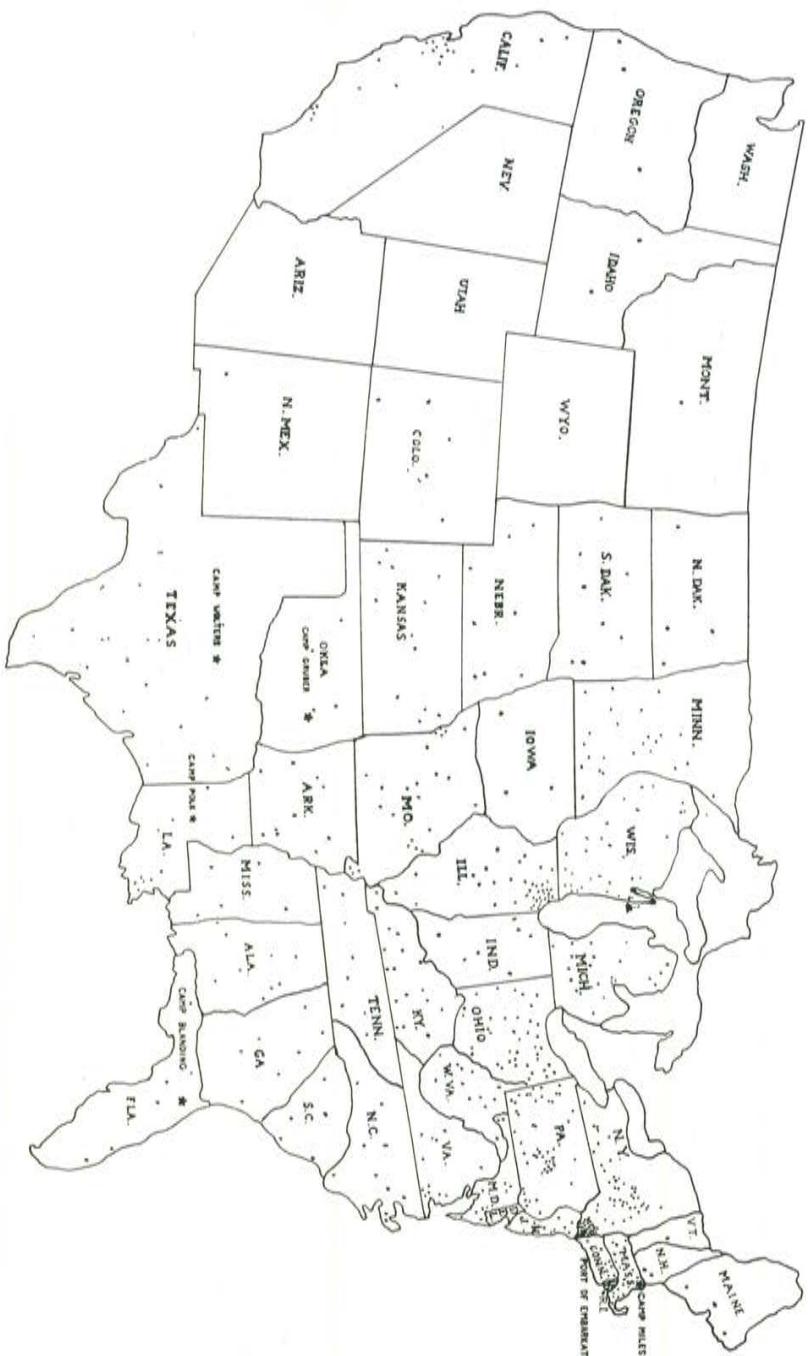
Camp Gruber was a new camp then and the men were to form a new outfit.

The long line of men picked their way through the buildings until they came to several that looked like all the rest. There they peeled off, found bunks, and disappeared for 24 hours.

The next morning, July 25th, the 48th Engineer Combat Regiment was activated and the tired men from the Twentieth were the cadre.

The 48th Regiment immediately looked to its grounds. There was a lot of police work to be done. Old Army custom demanded that noncoms and officers supervise work, but the cadre consisted only of supervisors, so the lieutenants and the noncoms formed long police lines and passed through their area. They picked up the wood scraps, spread the sandpiles, and soon had a neat looking regimental area.

The 48th In The 48



- | # | STATE | # OF MEN FROM EACH STATE |
|-----|------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | NEW YORK-69 | ★ 33. OKLAHOMA-4 |
| 2. | PENNSYLVANIA-50 | 34. IOWA-3 |
| 3. | ILLINOIS-40 | 35. MAINE-3 |
| 4. | OHIO-39 | 36. OREGON-3 |
| 5. | WISCONSIN-31 | 37. RHODE ISLAND-3 |
| 6. | MINNESOTA-26 | 38. IDAHO-2 |
| 7. | TEXAS-26 | 39. NEW HAMPSHIRE-2 |
| 8. | MISSOURI-25 | 40. MONTANA-1 |
| 9. | CALIFORNIA-22 | |
| 10. | MICHIGAN-22 | |
| 11. | MASSACHUSETTS-18 | |
| 12. | KENTUCKY-17 | |
| 13. | KANSAS-12 | |
| 14. | VIRGINIA-12 | |
| 15. | WIRGINIA-9 | |
| 16. | MARYLAND-11 | |
| 41. | NEW MEXICO-1 | |
| 42. | VERMONT-1 | |
| 25. | S.DAKOTA-8 | |
| 26. | GEORGIA-7 | |
| 27. | INDIANA-7 | |
| 28. | COLORADO-6 | |
| 29. | FLORIDA-6 | |
| 30. | MISSISSIPPI-5 | |
| 31. | S.CAROLINA-5 | |
| 32. | N.DAKOTA-4 | |

That was in the days when such a thing was commonplace, and it was considered very military to have a good looking company area. There were visiting colonels and generals who rode up and down to cast a criticising eye over the barracks and decide, which were military and which were not.

So the noncoms and the lieutenants policed the area and cleaned up the sand, discarded the wood, and the left-over paint, and cussed. It was July of '42 and it was hot and it was very degrading to attend police call.

But the regimental area began to look better and the cadre had more and more chance to learn a little more about being soldiers --- which consisted of saluting cars with red tags and ignoring cars with white ones, and otherwise walking very upright, lining foot lockers up on straight boards and buttoning up your jacket when you stepped outside.

In October, Colonel Bond, the Regimental Commander of the 48th Engineer Combat Regiment ordered the cadre to pick up 35 replacements. Shortly after, 105 new men arrived at the Braggs, Oklahoma depot. The men were put to work immediately on the following day, and learned to hope that Jerry would never use gas because it is very hot walking five miles with the suffocating contraption over your face. Then they learned the difference between right face and left face, and could soon give a very accountable parade.

But in between, they were learning engineer tasks like rigging, fixed bridges, and use of pioneer tools. They were getting good training, too, for the entire cadre for five companies was concentrated on 140 men. They were getting almost individual assistance.

Colonel Bond, Commanding the Regiment, expressed his satisfaction after a Regimental Retreat. "These men have the makings of the best Engineer Soldiers that this Army will ever see."

A few weeks later, rumor spread that a large number of replacements were coming in. Company B, the cadre company, could envision stripes and prestige and squads of their own. After a night ride from Camp Wolters, Texas, over 800 men, fresh from Infantry training, were sent to the Regiment. The original cadre Company "B" was disbanded and the men were sent among the other companies of the Regiment. A few days were spent in organizing and equipping the men, and then the new outfit settled down to some engineer training. The old cadre found the new men, just as they were, bewildered for a while, and helped them over the rough spots. As the training wore on, the new Infantry became Engineers.

Meanwhile, Colonel Bond was given another post. Lieutenant Colonel K. S. Andersson, his capable executive officer, assumed command.

The ground work of engineer training was complete now and the regiment began a serious study of advance work on minefields, demolitions, and tank obstacles. The long training days were tough, for Colonel Andersson believed that hard work would bring results. Training was rigorous through the fall, and did not slack up too much as winter set in. The troops were now hardened and the men were showing signs of expertness.

During the first few days of January, a bill was passed discharging essential war-workers over 38 years of age. The bill affected a lot of the men of the 48th, and over 400 new replacements were needed to fill the vacancies.

The new replacements were from New York City, and for a while felt rather confined in the town of Braggs with its pre-war population of 125. But the men caught the spirit of the outfit and pitched in wholeheartedly.

The spirit of the 48th was growing. The 48th was popular with the people of Muskogee and Tulsa, and the men of the 48th were making a lot of friends there.

The American Legion dance hall and Hotel Muskogee were the meeting places where the unattached engineers gathered over weekends. Most of the married men and officers had located small apartments, after a great deal of trouble, in Muskogee, and their weekends were well taken up.

But the single men found friends in Tulsa and Muskogee and spent their afternoons in the Tulsa Zoo, the Muskogee City Park or Greenleaf Lake. Their evenings were well occupied in the night spots that dotted the two towns or the movies and special entertainments that visited the camp or were at the USO or American Legion.

Cutting A Rug



During this period, new groups of men came in from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and Fort McClellan, so that now the 48th had men representing the north, south, east and west and almost every one of the 48 States. Among the men were a few Chinese, who later proved to be among the best soldiers.

With the completion of basic training, furloughs were granted to a number of men, and they returned to find a tough course in the M-1 rifle, obstacle and physical training in full swing.

In March, the 48th left for Louisiana Maneuvers.

The 48th Regiment pitched their pup tents on the side of a hill about a mile from Camp Polk and began their test as a fighting team: Shortly after, the 48th Regiment was dissolved and from the old regiment, the 1108th Engineer Combat Group was formed. Companies Able, Baker and Charlie of the Regiment formed the 48th Engineer Battalion and Dog, Easy and Fox Companies formed the 235th Engineer Battalion. The 48th Engineers were placed under the command of Captain Thomas K. Fullerton.

The men lived in miserable conditions while the process of organization was completed. The lines of pup tents became a patch of brown in the mud and water of Louisiana. To make it worse, the Battalion was scheduled for a 25 mile hike.

The men were not conditioned for anything so strenuous and consequently there were many sore and aching muscles. The equipment was full field pack, rifle, and one canteen of water. The battalion moved out, at two in the afternoon on a rare hot day, under a blistering sun and marched over small pebbled roads that had been baking through the day. The first five miles were completed in an hour at a killing pace under the hot sun. The pace was reduced, but the first leg had taken the fight out of the men and they continued the gruelling walk under the sun pretty well beaten. The canteens of water disappeared throughout the afternoon and when the half-way point was reached, most of the men had no water left. To add to their discomfort, two sandwiches apiece were handed out from a truck. But they were like pulp wood and the orange that was given each man made their need for water almost desperate. The men's feet began to blister from the hot pebbled roads and many of them were limping along trying to hold the pace. The afternoon sun was waning, and offered the men some relief, but after hours of walking, they were moving like automatons, quietly, holding their breath. In the darkness, the men got off the right trail and covered more than 28 miles before they reached their bivouac. The worst of all was that the last three miles were uphill on a steep incline that licked many of the men.

Sergeant Treloar, holder of the Silver Star and Bronze Star for gallantry in action said, "The 25 mile hike in Louisiana maneuvers was the worst experience I had in the whole war."

The following morning, as the men were lined up in front of the medical tent, and the Medics were attempting to repair the damage of the hike, Major Andrew J. Goodpaster, our new commander, arrived in the area.

Major Goodpaster was a West Point Officer. He was a soldier's idea of what an officer should be. He knew tactics and he knew men. There was something about him that could inspire men to go out of their way to complete his orders. He had confidence in his men; and although he adhered rigidly to rank, he spoke to the men as if he were one of them. There were many times when he would call an officer aside and let him know what he was doing wrong in no uncertain words.

The Major seemed to sense the feeling of pride that this outfit had, and it fitted into his plans exactly. The men had worried about what type of Commander they would have to take with them into the field when their time came. But now they were satisfied.

The 48th was ready for the first phase of Army Maneuvers. There was a quick series of moves through swamps and over hills with scant food, and sleepless nights with swarms of mosquitos and wood ticks. The 48th was mostly concerned with keeping roads open, although there were several bridges, and one night as Infantry when the capture of a Corps Command Post seemed imminent.

While the 48th was acting as Infantry, the Operations Sergeant brought the situation map to Major Goodpaster on a hill. The map showed the location of all of the 48th's positions as well as all of the known enemy strong-points. When the Major saw the secret material that the sergeant had, he was alarmed. "Sergeant", he called, "you know better than to bring that map up here. Double time down the hill immediately. If the enemy ever captured that information there would be heck to pay!"

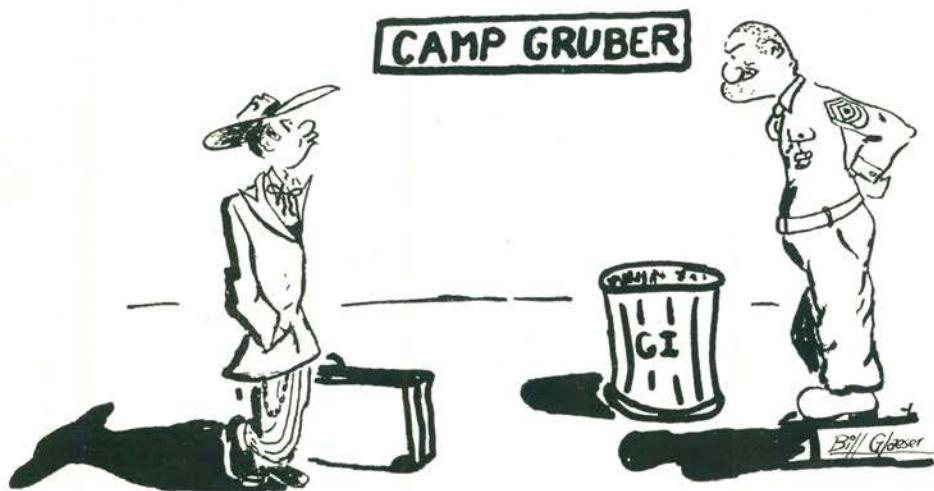
The following day, the Major went forward with Pvt. Mattson in the command car. He was encircled and captured by the opposing force, and the map with the full information was found in his command car. The Major was rather quiet about the whole affair when he returned.

The two phases of maneuvers for the 48th passed surprisingly fast and the 48th returned to Camp Polk and the luxury of pyramidal tents with floor-boards for awhile. There were camp shows and lots of resting time.

Passes were given every night and the men went to Camp Polk, to Manny or to Leesville.

One of the highlights of the 48th's stay in Camp Polk was a battalion dance. All day the men worked on a temporary dance floor out under the stars, and by evening lights were strung across the space. The men showered and put on their natty sun-tan uniforms to impress this new female army.

There were many WACs at Camp Polk, and one evening a detachment of them were the guests of the 48th for a dance under the stars. Some of the men just went for the show. They formed a big circle around the dancers and made unsoldierly remarks about their sergeants as they watched the glamorous engineers turn their charm on full steam.



The stars, the soft light and the sweet music affected some of the more romantic men, and they found that sun-tan uniforms doesn't make a soldier. The WACs were just as swell as the civilians and were pretty good soldiers besides.

Leesville was a notorious town. Most of the town had moved in when the soldiers did at Camp Polk. A lot of it was completely on wheels, for the soldiers had moved their wives into town, and trailer parks covered the outskirts of town. Originally, the population was 5,000 but now every spare room held a family and the population had swollen to well over 25,000. There was a skating rink, three movies which ground out endless Westerns, and bars in every other house. The town overflowed with soldiers, and there were street fights, brawls and tussles with the Military Police and civilians. The town seemed to hold a spell over the soldiers and they were everywhere. There was a Red Cross Club and the men would drop in for snacks or to listen to the music. But most of the men strolled along the streets, hung around the carnivals or sipped drinks at the Green Frog Bar.

Then maneuvers were over and the 48th entrained for Camp Gruber again. There were courses under fire, like combat in cities, and combat tactics, and the men had extensive training on the rifle range. Many promotions were made, among them were Major Goodpaster to Lieutenant Colonel, and Captain Fullerton to Major as Executive Officer. Many of the men who had proven physically unfit during the maneuvers were weeded out and replacements to fill the vacancies were sent from Camp Shelby, Mississippi. There was no doubt about it that everyone knew in spite of the earlier prediction to the contrary, the 48th was for overseas.

The next day, Colonel Andersson, Group Commander, dispelled all doubts and rumors in a frank message to the entire Group. He told the men that they had passed through a hard and extensive training period and they were now ready. The Group was prepared for the assignment that lay ahead. "The 1108th Group," he said, "Will soon be transferred overseas." The Colonel, an old soldier who had seen service in the last war, said that this was the great chance to right the great wrong that had been done before. "I have waited twenty years for this," the Colonel concluded.

The new men from Shelby were disappointed at first when they learned that they had just joined an outfit that was already practically on the way, but they soon caught the increased tempo of preparations, and the excitement of going overseas. The 48th had an air of tension that was mounting daily as the rumor and truth sifted through the ranks. There were several fast gay weeks of parades and parties, and some quick intensive training, and then it was over. On August 10th, the members of the 48th Engineers boarded a train at Braggs, Oklahoma --- destination unknown.

The train rolled through the night while the men tried to figure if it was going East or West. East meant the European Theatre with action in Sicily, perhaps, while the West meant the Pacific and Australia and a few nameless little islands. The men were crossing their fingers for the East. It was almost an unanimous hope through the whole train. Someone caught a passing station name, but it was so small that no one knew it, and then the ripple of recognition spread through the train as more place names flashed by. The 48th was moving east... so far. The men went to sleep in the coaches. At least that problem was solved. There would be other ones tomorrow.

It was late afternoon on the 12th of August when we arrived at Camp Miles Standish located 35 miles southeast of Boston, Massachusetts. It was a nice camp, but the 48th didn't come prepared for a long stay. Equipment was checked again for the hundredth time. Names and numbers had to be in the exact spot. Inspecting Officers came around with rulers to make sure that every piece of equipment and clothing fitted the specifications of long tabulated forms. Shortages were filled freely and the last processing for overseas shipment was completed.



CHAPTER II

AFRICA

On August 20th, the 48th boarded a sealed troop train for New York Harbor and boarded the U.S.S. Edmund B. Alexander.

The following day the ship sailed.

When the U.S.S. Alexander left the Statue of Liberty abeam she was carrying a specialized team aboard. The 48th Engineer Combat Battalion was the product of long weeks of drill and months of experience in engineer training. The 48th had never built a bridge under fire, but the men had a fair idea of what it would be like. There were unknown rivers ahead, but after all, a river that was twenty feet wide in Europe would be bridged in the same manner as a river that was twenty feet wide in Louisiana.

The men knew their officers and noncoms better, too. They had confidence in one another that had formed them into a team that could look forward to their work with a feeling that the 48th would be equal to the task.

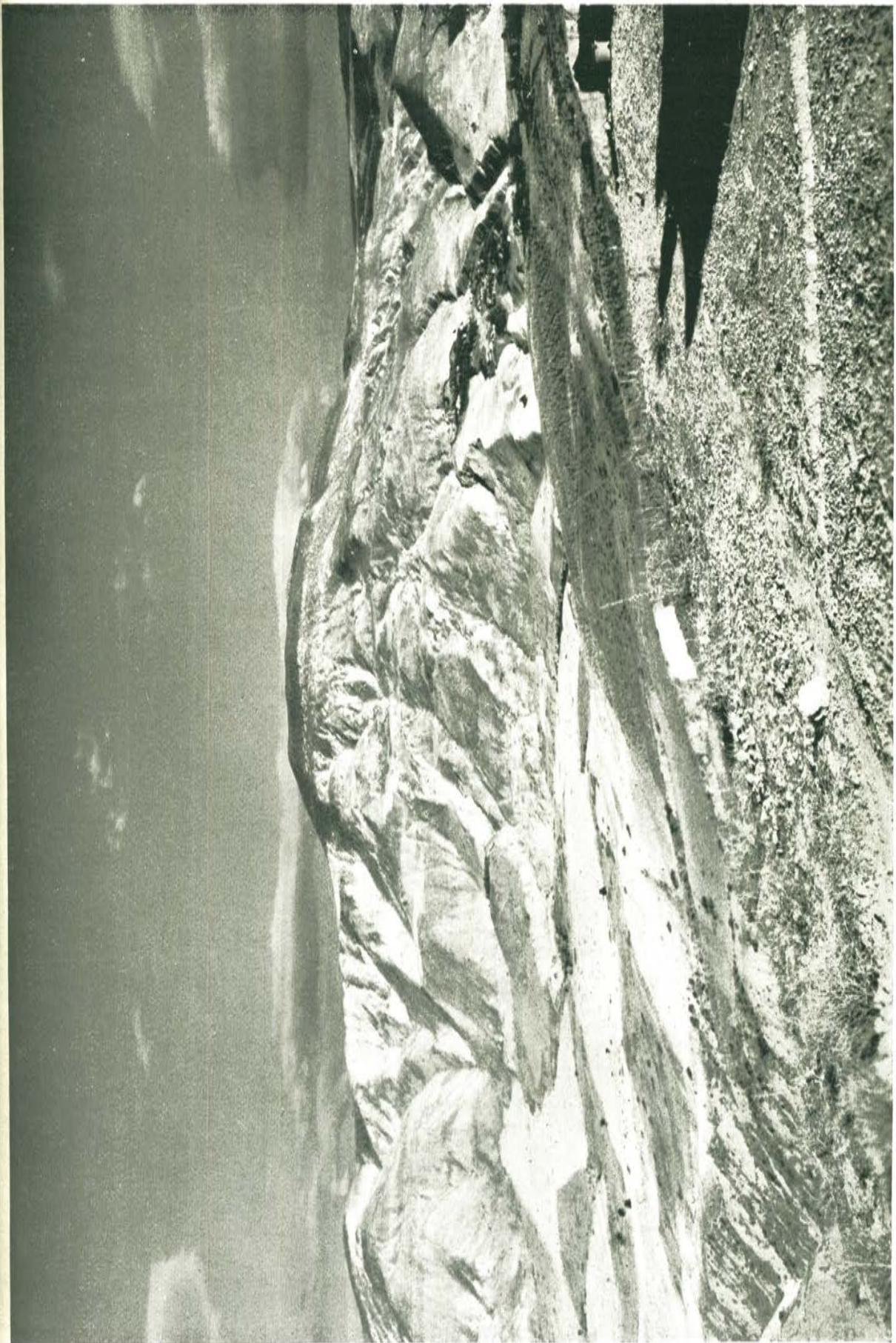
The convoy closed in around the troopships, and moved out from the coast. Far on the horizon, lithe grey destroyers and destroyer escorts moved up and down and flashed signals with powerful lights. But the convoy moved slowly, and the men became accustomed to the gentle roll of the large ship. There weren't many casualties from seasickness among the 48th, for the weather was excellent throughout the entire voyage. A few of the casualties were dysentery cases from the chow. There were so many men aboard ship, that chow was served in sections, and the long line wound up and down the decks and through the inside of the ship. It was stifling inside the ship and several men passed out before they reached the spot where the chow was served. At any rate when they finally did get near the food, it was so hot that they couldn't eat.

With the great number of men aboard, some sort of order was necessary at chow time. There were red and black buttons that were handed out by the section leaders to the men as they passed. The button bore the section name, and the "reds" and "blacks" would alternate "eating first" by days. Officers stationed near the serving table would yell "Tickets in your right hand. Mess gear in your left! Hurry, hurry, hurry!!" The plans of the officers would go amiss, however, for when the men passed through the hatches with trayloads of food, the ship would roll and trays, tickets, and men would go banging to the floor. After this calamity had happened several times, the floor would be slick as glass, and it would take an amateur acrobat to reach the mess hall tables safely. Once the tables were reached, a thin strip of wood fastened to the tables kept the trays from clattering to the floor, but now and then, they would float mysteriously to the other end of the table.

"Mae West" life preservers were worn constantly. They were hot and we couldn't move our arms and they made us feel clumsy as we tried to pass up and down the narrow companion ways.

Sleeping was a problem. There were two shifts. One group occupied the stacks of canvas cots from twelve noon to twelve midnight and then alternated with the second group who took the reverse shift.

It was hot in the hold and it was crowded, for the bunks were lined in tiers of twelve and reached from the floor to the ceiling. The upper bunk was a much sought for prize, for overhead the ventilator shafts sent cool air into the stuffy hold. But everyone couldn't get a top bunk, and after a little scrambling, the men found a bunk somewhere else in the hold.



Mountain at St. Dennis Du Sig. Climbed by the Battalion at Night.

At night, there was complete blackout on board, for the men knew only too well the terrific toll of American ships that the German undersea raiders were taking off the Eastern Coast of the United States. There were few offenders, but there was a constant reminder, "Blackout is now in effect; all lighting of cigarettes on the open deck is prohibited. Any infringement of these rules will jeopardize the lives of all hands on board."

The confusion and the cramped quarters weren't the worst thing aboard ship. Perhaps worst of all, was the spare time we had to think. There was a period of physical exercises in the morning, and other than guard duty, it was the only detail that we had to stand. We amused ourselves by playing cards and signing out Red Cross Games, but most of us laid on the hatches or wandered up and down the ship.

It was hard to realize that we were really on our way now, and there was no turning back. We were part of all of those things that the newspapers were talking about. We were on our way to war.

Some of us were leaving wives and girl friends and a lot of big plans that would have to wait for a while. We wondered how long it would take and how long it would be until we got home again. The army still seemed a little unreal. Training had been fast and complete, and the USO life in garrison was over now. A lot of us had been hoping for this to happen. We thought that this would be the end of saluting and policing up areas and falling out for reveille. But it would be the end of weekends in Muskogee and nights at the movies and beer at the PX, too. We tried to weigh one against the other.

It was romantic, though. We would be seeing a lot of places that we had studied about, and a lot of things that our friends back home had never seen. We were even a little anxious to try our hand. Some of us wanted to really get a bridge up under fire just to see if it could be done. A lot of us wanted to make some real rank and be a sergeant or a squad leader.

But most of all we were anxious. We wondered what it would be like over there. We hoped we could make the grade, and come home.

As the days wore on we were wondering when we would get off the ship. The ship seemed to be getting smaller and smaller, for the first few days of travelling were new and exciting, but by now we were anxious for land and a chance to leave the ship's hot hold.

After two weeks at sea, the stark white shaft of Gibraltar loomed into view, with the faint brown coastline of Spain on the left, and Spanish Morocco on the right. Somehow the fact that Gibraltar was white astonished a lot of us. We were so used to seeing the Prudential Life Insurance advertisement in black, that the white shaft gleaming in the sun off the port bow held us spell-bound.

The ship passed through the straits in the morning and the land fell away again. But we knew we were in the Mediterranean now and we were on our way to Sicily or Africa.

The following morning we were again off a coastline. The ship dropped anchor off a long quay that ran out into the bay. The harbor had a strange oriental appearance. Rumor spread that we were waiting for a Hollywood troupe of actresses who were going to give us a show right on the ship before we landed, and for a long while we hung over the side looking for beautiful blondes among the palm trees, but the show just didn't materialize, somehow.

In the afternoon, the gangplank did rasp down, though, and we were treated to a better show. We walked down the long pier to solid ground again. We assembled in a rock quarry in the early evening and waited for the trucks that were to take us to a staging area. One of the men attempted to light a cigarette, and an officer corrected him. "We are in a war zone now," he said. "Put out your cigarettes. This place is bombed often." The men adhered to the order rigidly. After all, we were out here in the open, and this was a strange land. Germans probably were waiting for the big convoy. When we passed Gibraltar, they must have had people counting the ships. The Lieutenant was right. A bomber could see the flare of our match, and even see our cigarettes, we had been told. There was no smoking.

We didn't wait long. A line of trucks drew up before the quarry and we piled aboard. We were pretty solidly packed but we didn't mind at all. It was getting dark now, but in spite of the hushed warnings about enemy aircraft, the trucks blazed their headlights. The convoy wheeled around and dashed down the road. We passed quickly through the harbor town of Mers El Kebir and rolled along the coastal highway towards Oran.

Although it was night, Oran was awake when we rushed through. The main road led through the heart of the city, and the people were lined along the balconies to welcome us. The French and Arabs waved and yelled, and little Arab boys raced beside the trucks and clamored for bonbons and cigarettes. The buildings flashed white under the headlights as the big trucks roared through the narrow streets.

Then we were through Oran and out in the open again, gathering speed as we followed the road. It led up a hill, and then the line of trucks turned off to where there were pyramidal tents. We climbed off the trucks and were formed into a ragged line. There five of us at a time were peeled off and led through the darkness to the tents. It was so dark that we had no idea who our tent partners were. We arranged our bedrolls and fell on them. We should have slept, for it was late, and we had had a busy day. But sleep was difficult, and we laid awake most of the night and talked. Africa was all so strange and new that we talked lightly to create our own atmosphere. We were amazed at the African city of Oran, and the palm trees, and the Arabs. We were wondering when we could get into town, and how long we would stay here in this place.

The sweet smell of the night and the strange silence of Africa was affecting us. We felt alone and lonely in the tents.

The next morning, when we awoke, we found that we were near acres of grape arbors that followed the contours of the low hills in long twisting green trails that swept endlessly across the rolling hills.

Colonel Goodpaster rescinded all standing courts-martials that had been accumulated during the stay in the states. We were starting out fresh on a new continent and he believed, that the men should start out with clean records.

Passes were frequent from Staging Area Number 2 during our stay at Fleurus. In all, we stayed nine days from the second of September to the eleventh. We visited nearby Oran and wandered among the bars and rows of dirty houses.

Oran was a military city, and was even more strict than those back in the states. There were standard fines for unsoldierly mistakes, such as shirts unbuttoned, failure to salute, and improper uniform. There was a bitter feeling between the men who had fought the campaign in Africa and the clerks and the service troops who had followed after, and there had been many pitched battles in the streets. The police had clamped down, and now there was red tape and regulations, and many of the streets were "Off Limits."

Although Oran looked clean and white from a distance, actually it was unbelievably filthy. People threw their refuse into the streets directly out of their front windows, and the many animals were brought right into the houses. In winter, the animals helped to warm the rooms, but in summer, the hot sun intensified the animal stench, and made the entire native quarters of the city smell like one big stable.

But some of the French in Oran had nice houses. Here some of the men of the 48th made friends, but most of the families already had their own circle of American troops from among those who had been stationed there for a long time.

Most of the men of the 48th just walked the streets and explored the quaint shops or dropped in at the Red Cross or the popular "Joe's Joint" for beer and drinks. Some of us tried passes at the native Arab girls who would walk by with their faces veiled. They would coyly lift a corner of the veil at us, and we would follow, but eventually the women would disappear.

The native kids ganged up on the American soldiers wherever they went. They were unusually quick to learn important words in the English language, and could guide us to the nearest bar or carriage station, for a small fee of one cigarette or some bonbons. The shoe shine kids were a breed of their own and they would pester a soldier until in desperation he'd yell, "Allé, allé!"

The carriages were the taxis of Oran. They were huge wheeled affairs pulled by a lonesome bony horse, almost as intelligent as the driver. The horse would know from long practice where to go and the driver was merely on top of the carriage to make decisions about the fare. This usually involved asking three times the regular price of the ride and most often getting it from the Americans, who would rather pay than argue.

Haggling over prices never appealed to the Americans, who would rather have someone set their price and take the article or refuse it. But not the Arabs. They enjoyed name-calling, and the seller would start off at three times what the article was worth. After a fierce argument that would often last hours, he would drop the price, and the other Arab would buy. Then both would go off looking like they had been gyped.

We could see these business scenes all over town. Two Arabs with their fists clenched, standing toe to toe and wildly yelling and gestulating at each other. At first we enjoyed the novelty; later it disgusted us.

Present day Arabs are the greatest thieves that we had ever encountered. Ali Baba and his 40 thieves were amateurs compared to them. Nothing was safe around them. Corporal Hanson lost his wrist watch right from his wrist without knowing it to some Arab kid, and one night the leather straps on the vehicles were stolen. Other men at the Staging Area told us many stories about the Arabs that were hard to believe, but after a couple of days experience we learned to accept their tall stories as the absolute truth.

Arabs were unusually shrewd. We learned that our mattress covers would bring the fabulous price of twenty dollars, and suddenly many of them were missing. Cigarettes and almost any article of clothing could be sold for five times what they would cost us to replace them. We didn't stay long enough to do much bargaining, but many of the soldiers stationed in Africa had a source of spending money in their rations.



We learned about Africa fast. First, we learned the preciousness of good water, from the unquenchable thirst which alkaline water never satisfies. A few men took to Vino, the sturdy Arab wine, and soon learned that the harmless appearing liquid carried a powerful aftermath.

We learned about the African dust that billowed above every road and poured through every opening. We soon took on the appearance of Arabs ourselves.

On the 11th of September, we convoyed to nearby St. Dennis du Sig where we were perched on top of a high hill that gave us a panorama of the surrounding countryside. Large herds of sheep moved slowly down the paths under the guidance of sure footed goats. The Arabs moved through the valley perched sideways on miniature donkeys that somehow seemed like they couldn't hold the weight for another step.

The 48th fought their first campaign in St. Dennis against overwhelming odds. Millions of soft, squeamish bugs converged on the men of the 48th from all directions. We built floors for our tents, but they crossed the boards. Then we dug trenches around our tents, but they crossed these obstacles. When we put water and oil in the trenches they swam across and trailed oil over our bunks. They were everywhere. We stamped them out, we burned them out, we sprayed them out, we gassed them out, but they kept coming. They thrived on insect powder, and went out of their way to come to the tent with the most preventatives. We tried everything, and then finally surrendered. They crossed through our mosquito bars and crawled into our mattress covers. The ground would be a mass of moving brown as they outflanked us and converged. They didn't seem to sleep. Their night attacks in force

were worse than their daylight attacks. We attempted to sleep but they would crawl over our faces and stand on our foreheads and deliberately stamp their feet. We tore up our beds and ruthlessly stamped them out, but they surrounded us again, and by night, several regiments of them would crawl into our blankets with us.

The bugs had no sense of politeness. They were just plain greedy. We wouldn't mind sharing our quarters with them and splitting our rations two ways, but a battalion of bugs swarming over a package from home was enough to make a guy let them have the whole thing.

Eventually the bugs got use to us and accepted us as part of the landscape. Then they would just crawl over us to reach other objectives. The 48th was outsmarted, outflanked, and outmaneuvered. We went down in defeat and let the bugs crawl where they would.

While at St. Dennis, the 48th began a period of extensive bridge and mine training, coupled with long hikes and physical exercise. It was a rough deal for the men. All during the period of training we built and tore down bridges day after day. There were a few night problems, too. We would work all day long in the hot sun and come back to the area thinking we would get a good night's sleep. That was where we were wrong for right after chow we would be called out for a night problem.

We would load on trucks and speed to the Bridge Dump, load the Bailey Bridge on the trucks and go down the road to our next site. This was all done in total darkness. Upon our arrival at the site, we would unload the bridging as quietly as possible, being careful not to make any noise. There were men all around us in the darkness and if they heard any noise they would send up a flare. If they saw anyone move they would throw a half pound of TNT at him. After we had the bridge in we would have to take it out and load it back on the trucks. Then it was taken back to the dump where it was unloaded and stacked in their respective piles for the next day's training. The next day we would be given a lecture on the work done the night before.

The next school was on mines and booby-traps. Up until this time none of the men of the 48th had ever seen any and they were very careful in handling them until they knew all about them. It was in Africa that the men saw the new explosive, Composition "C", for the first time. They were shown how to make it into hand grenades and various other ways of using it. There were schools in the setting of booby-traps and the laying of hasty and deliberate minefields. We practiced probing, marking, and lifting mines.

For a few days we had night problems. At night we would go to an area and meet the officer in charge. He usually told us that there was a minefield down the road somewhere. That was our job, to find it, and to clear a path through it. The field was marked by a single strand of barbed wire on the ground. It was covered by fire from .50 and .30 calibre machine guns and the men would fire a few bursts over our heads while we were working to keep us down and to get us used to breaching minefields under combat conditions.

In the days that followed we were told that the army had a tank with an attachment on it called a "Scorpion." This consisted of two arms projecting from the sides of the tank about ten feet to the front. Between the two arms was a drum with long iron flails on it that rotated as the tank drove through the minefield. The object of the flails was to detonate the teller mines without injury to the tank or its personnel. It didn't work that way in the demonstration that followed. The men were assembled on a high hill that overlooked the demonstration area. Three "Scorpions" were brought out and they started on their task. The first one got about three-fourths of the way through when it had one of its tracks blown off. The second tank was a casualty when it was only half way through the field and the third had just got started when it was put out of action. The tank men brought out a T-2 Tank Retriever, but they were a little wary about sending it into the field before it was cleared, thinking that it, too, might be blown up. The men of the 48th decided from the demonstration that the method of probing was the best. While it was hard of work and more dangerous, yet it was the most sure way.

We took up the art of laying a hasty minefield. After laying them down, picking them up again several times, we began to think that we were pretty good. Take five paces out, two to the right, lay a mine, five paces out, two to the right and lay a mine, five paces out, two to the left and lay a mine.

It was so simple that we thought we could do it blindfolded. Upon hearing the word blindfolded, our officer in charge conceived a game. We were to lay out the mines blindfolded. The first bunch, picked up their mines, had a blindfold put on and began stepping out. The men's sense of direction failed them and before they had set down their second mine, they were hopelessly entangled. The men were not so cocky after that exhibition, and once more without the blindfold attempted to achieve perfection.

Sergeant McGinnis of Able Company was the first casualty of the 48th. He was assisting in booby-trap instruction when a demolition charge went off in his face. He received severe shrapnel wounds and lacerations on his face, and was partially blinded. For a long while after, the men of the 48th were more careful when they handled demolitions. They had suddenly become dangerous to all of us.

One day an order was posted that the following day all helmets had to have the name and rank of the men painted on the front.

Sergeants Dawkins and Treloar of Charlie Company were among the many who appeared the following day in a formation without the necessary paint. They were put in charge of a hike detail of all men in the Battalion who had neglected their duty and required to hike up a nearby mountain. They were given a demolition charge and were required to light a fire at the top of the mountain when they reached it, to assure the officers that they had made the long climb. They started out late in the afternoon, and later that night, a dull boom echoed across the valley. The waiting men could see the faint glow of a fire far off on the very top of the mountain. The tired men arrived late at night, and the following morning they were dutifully applying brushes to the front of their helmets.

Some time later, a battalion hike was scheduled up the mountain as part of the training program. About ten o'clock at night the column of four companies moved out and started up the hill. Sergeant Fosbinder and Corporal Westermann of Charlie Company were moving up the hill talking. When they came to a narrow place where the trail dipped away, Corporal Westermann fell in behind Sergeant Fosbinder. Through the darkness, Fosbinder tried to keep the man ahead in sight, and paid no attention to Westermann behind. All of a sudden Westermann stopped talking. Sergeant Fosbinder took several more steps and then called to Westermann in the gloom. Fosbinder, upon hearing no answer turned around and began looking for Corporal Westermann. He walked back down the trail and found Westermann attempting to climb out of a hole. He had broken his glasses and could not see. For the rest of the hike, Sergeant Fosbinder led him up the mountainside.

There was a terrific French show one night to grace the 1108th Engineers' theatre stage out under the stars. The French girls wore tissue thin costumes and sang "El Rancho Grande" prettily for the boys. One particularly heavy girl singled out a handsome G. I. in the audience and attempted all evening to get him up on the stage. She never did succeed, but in one of her acts, she began a gushing dance that made the Chaplain quietly pick up his hat and leave.

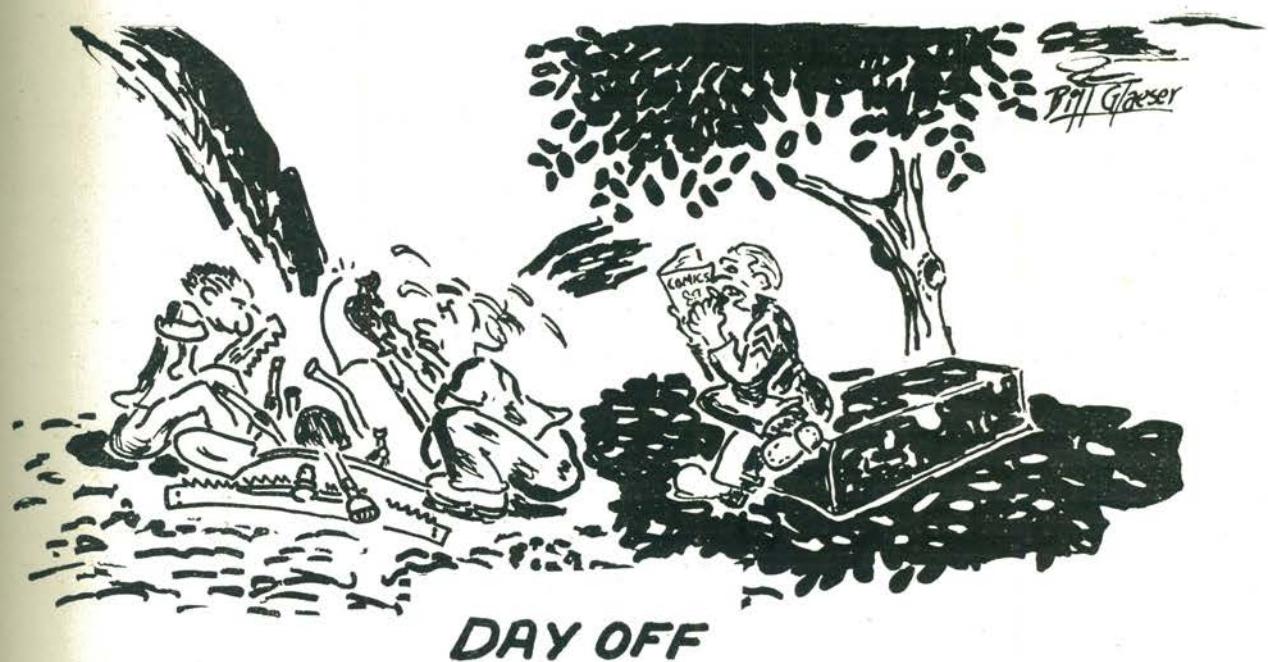
The officers had a club fitted up for themselves at St. Dennis, and they would spend the evenings in happy companionship there. One night, Lieutenant Finnegan spent a little happier time than usual, and while making his way back through the line of tents, somehow got into Colonel Goodpaster's tent. He was a bit unsteady and began knocking things around. "Give me a flashlight," he demanded angrily. The Colonel obligingly handed the Lieutenant his. The next morning Lieutenant Finnegan could only remember somewhat dimly what had happened and realized that there was a strange flashlight in his tent. All during the day, he kept asking the noncoms and junior officers, "Whose flashlight do I have?" Two days later, the colonel in a passing remark, asked the lieutenant politely, "Would you mind returning my flashlight?"

The noncoms were not to be outdone by the officers, so they received permission to have a noncoms club. After some tent pitching, they had one ready for the binge. Four master sergeants, Hoopes, Knight, Blankenship and Buckley were placed in charge to keep order and to watch the bar. The first night the place opened with cognac, wine, and the native vino. Before the evening was over there were three very plastered noncoms -- Hoopes, Blankenship and Knight. The native wine was easy to drink. It seemed like the vino was just like water. You could drink a quart of it without any effect -- until you stood up, and your knees would buckle. Vino was likened to the Medic who pounded on our knees with a rubber hammer.

The privates felt slighted. There was a club for the noncoms and a club for the officers, but they were supposed to be good. Actually there were a lot more sergeants by night than there were by day in the 48th, but to make it look legal, the privates had to complain.

Extensive plans were laid to make the privates club bigger, better and more interesting than all the rest, but while the club was still in the planning stage, it was called off. There wouldn't be time. The 48th had received its orders.

While in Africa the 48th had trained hard, for this was the last training period before action. In all, the 48th's stay in Africa was brief. The outfit landed on September 2nd, and a month later, we boarded the "Durbin Castle" at Mers el Kebir bound for Italy.



CHAPTER III

»WE WAITED 20 YEARS«

The 48th acted like old voyagers on the Durbin Castle. By this time we were quite familiar with ships, and besides we knew that this would be a short trip. The boat soon looked like a miniature Monte Carlo. We had to step on the center of a hundred card games to make our way across the deck. The flying fish still attracted us, and some of the men would spend hours gazing over the side watching the marvelous skips that the little fish made across the waves. The flying fish were like skipping stones. Often they would touch the waves two or three times before they would be engulfed by a whitecap.

We had to take time out for the English tea and crumpets, and we cussed the food that the "Limeys" handed out, but we weren't on the ship long enough to really get steamed up about it.

But the Limeys did their best to be good, although we distrusted them. They were continually wondering about "This Harry James person" and curious about how we managed to get so many good cigarettes.

The morning of the third day dawned like a picture post card. The blue green Mediterranean reached for the deep blue sky. On our quarter an island was coming up. We gathered forward to look at it and the sailors passed the word that it was the famous Isle of Capri. The island was terraced with the grape arbors from which came the Capri wines, some of the best in all Italy. The houses were white with red tile roofs, and the terraced roads wound around the island to the city and church at the top. The entire island was small; just an island that rose from the sea, and the ship passed close enough to give us a detailed view of the place.

Behind the island, Mt. Vesuvius was a purple patch against the light blue sky. A trail of grey reached across the heavens from its cone producing a picture of exquisite beauty. But the long white line of crumbled villas along the shoreline cast a strange spell on the beauty of the scene.

Then we swept past the bay of Naples with its white patch of city banked up against the purple of the mountains and crossed the peninsula of Pouzzouli to the small harbor of Bagnoli, on Naples' northern outskirts.

It was noon when the small landing barges began to ferry us to the piers at Bagnoli. We were told to be careful where we stepped on the beach and around the city, for only this morning, over half a company had been killed by mines. We landed on the shore and waited for the rest of the companies to make the four mile trip from ship to shore. Then we gathered into small march groups and began a hike through the town. It was the 6th of October, and the great port of Naples had been taken just a few days previously. But already, the Italians knew the sight of happy American soldiers. We received our indoctrination of the discordant symphony, "Bonbons, cigarettes" that was to follow us through Italy. As yet the Italian kids didn't know the English equivalent for what they wanted, but it did not take them long to learn.

The Pizons lined the path from the quay and waved us on happily. They had oranges to trade for cigarettes, and bottles of white and red wine for a pack. They would run beside our march line and grab us with entreaties to buy.

Bagnoli was a city of narrow twisting streets lined with lovely signorinas. We pointed out the pretty girls to one another gleefully. It was a strange procession. The Americans were strung out along the streets loaded down with their equipment. The small Italian children ran in and through the

column to grab a soldier's arm and ask for bonbons or cigarettes. Now and then, one of the men fell out of line momentarily to make a hasty trade of a few cigarettes for a bottle of vino or a handful of nuts.

We were quartered in Constance Collegio de Ciano. The university buildings had been built in 1938 from the pennies of school children which had been gathered throughout Italy for the project. The school had originally been intended for orphans, but had been taken over by the Army. Later the Germans had moved in and camouflaged the buildings with huge landscapes painted on the sides, that reached the whole four stories high. Later the basement of the building had been tunneled and thousands of cases of ammunition moved in. The ammunition was still there in tunnels that penetrated as far as a mile back into the hills. The ammunition had not been moved, for it was believed that the cases had been booby-trapped and possibly time-charged. We heard rumors that some of the first troops in town had found whole cases of the prized war souvenir -- German Luger Pistols. The idea of sleeping over tons of booby-trapped explosives worried us for a while, but most of us managed to sleep that night.



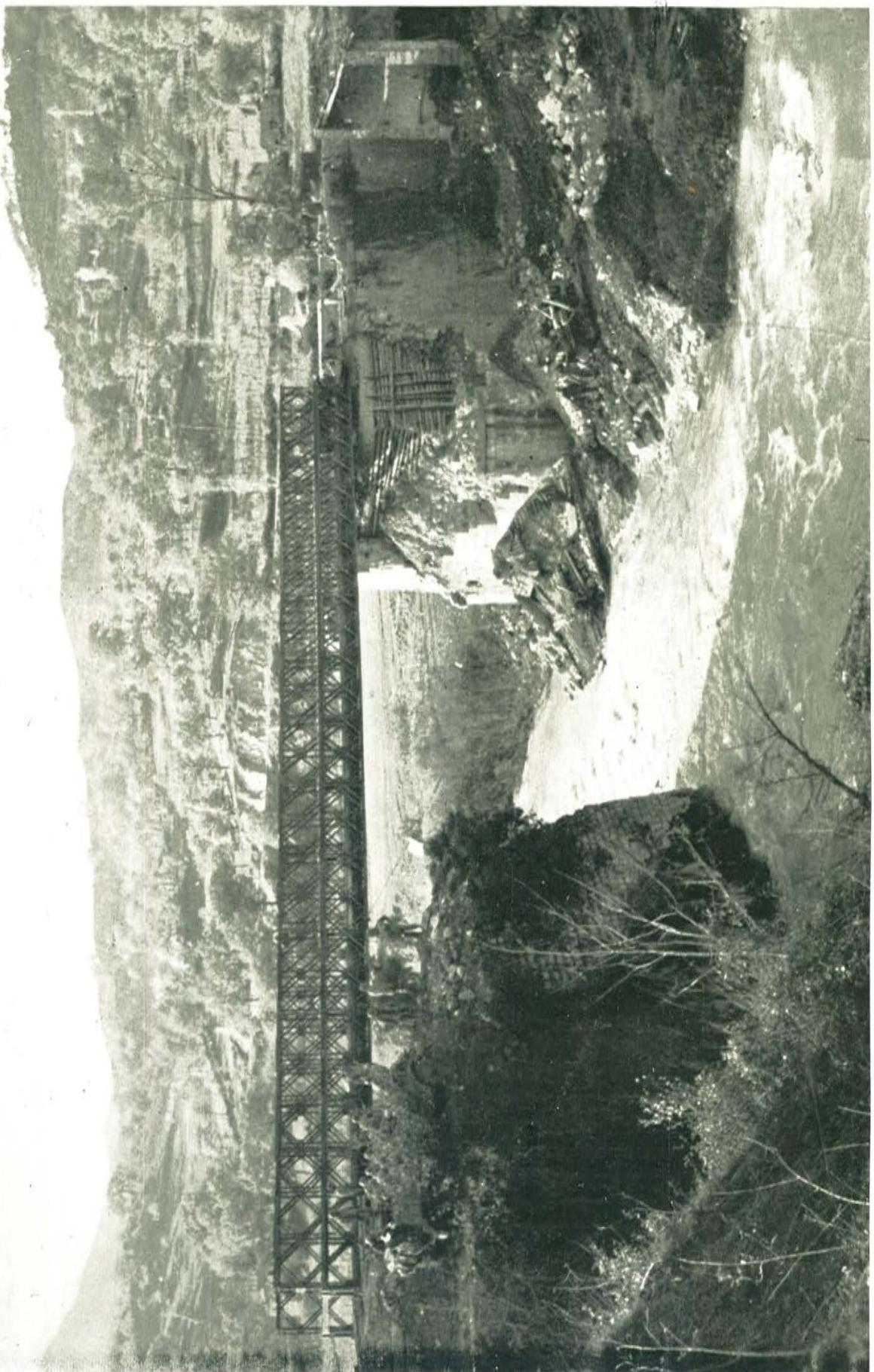
We had a chance to explore the tangled mass of steel that had been the railroad station before a big American air force bombed it with hundreds of Flying Fortresses from Africa. There was nothing left standing in the Bagnoli railroad marshalling station, and was beyond repair. Some of the huge bombs landed in the town, and there were many complete blocks of rubble and lonely walls that testified to the force of the massed bombing raids that were happening every night over some city in Fortress Europe.

We enjoyed the town, but we couldn't leave the college during the early evening hours. It would have been easy to slip out, and there would be a lot of interesting places to visit once we did get out, but the trigger-happy guards had been spaced around the entire college to keep people away from the tons of ammunition that were stored there. Naples was a town of Fascists, and there were stories that German soldiers were still being picked up. There was a healthy fear around the college, that saboteurs might slip in and blow the entire place skyhigh. All night long, shots from the guards rang out at intervals, and there were yells and commands of "Halt, who goes there," far into the early hours of the morning.

We had slept in huge classroom chambers, about thirty men to a room during the night. It had been a cool night, and the wind swept freely through the rooms, for a large percentage of the window glass had been broken by the concussion of the exploding bombs which had wrecked the railroad station and part of the town.

The following morning we were ordered out of the college entirely while a crew of bomb-disposal men made a thorough check of the rooms and tunnels to attempt to find the booby-traps that had been reported. Most of us were sure that the rumor had been false, for the engineers had explored the whole building yesterday and nothing was found.

The Ritter Bridge at Coll



On the 16th of October the Battalion borrowed trucks for a move because our own equipment had not arrived as yet. The colored drivers raced through Naples and then turned North past the battered town of Avellino to a large grove of hazelnut trees and grape vines where we pitched our tents. The country nearby showed the effects of war, for there had been recent fighting in this area. Homeless people were living in caves and sheltered behind the rubbed walls of houses. We walked among the rubble of the nearby town of Avellino and wondered what it would be like to work under artillery fire that could tumble villages into heaps of rubble such as this. We were awed by the whole thing, and wondered how many towns we would see like this.

The kids of the town had hazelnuts and fruit for sale and passed through the area trading their wares for cigarettes and candy. The nuts were growing on the nearby trees, but for a cigarette we could get whole handfuls of them legally without having to pick them. It was easier.

The Italian women were the most amazing of all. They would walk along with huge bundles balanced expertly on their heads. Sometimes there would be a fifty pound sack of grain, and other times a huge hamper full of wash or a bucket of water. They had a tiny pad of cloth that they placed on top of their hair, and then swung their load up on the pad and started off. Most of the Italians were gathering poles about fifteen feet long for their grape vines during the early fall, and the women would carry fifty or more at a time.

On the morning of the 18th, the 48th was moved to the vicinity of Caserta in the trucks of the 425th Engineer Dump Truck Company. Caserta was a big town, and the King's summer palace was the main feature of the town. It was a spacious building, fully 200 yards square with huge courtyard walls. The palace had over 500 rooms. Three of the rooms that had previously been the King's reception room had been made into a Red Cross Center for service men. Fifth Army had taken the Castle over as their headquarters. Behind the palace was a formal walk on each side of an artificial lake which stretched for well over a mile. Water fountains, graceful statues, ascending steps and holly bordering each side of the walk made a restful atmosphere for a soldier to spend an hour or two. The town had been damaged during the fighting, but the palace was still intact.

In the evening of the same day that we had moved, Able Company received the first job of the 48th -- removing mines from a road north of Caserta. Lt. Munson's platoon was given the assignment. The next day a road maintenance request was received. We didn't have our heavy equipment as yet so the men began working with hand shovels filling potholes.

Most of us who had reasoned that garrison soldiering would soon be forgotten when we arrived overseas, received a severe blow. Fifth Army published an order that all men of the army were to receive three-hours drill and a lecture on military courtesy each week, and that in the future, saluting would be an absolute necessity. One man in H&S was fined for not wearing his leggins while on duty.

We were trigger-happy in Caserta. Two men were lifting a machine gun into the back of a truck when it fired. It hit a loaded rifle of another man standing nearby and discharged the rifle. The rifle bullet passed through the man's body, and before help could be summoned, the man died. Another man, fooling around with a pistol, wounded himself and had to be hospitalized. The 48th had one man killed and two severely wounded, before the Battalion even got into action.

At 2130 on the 22nd of November the Townsend Harris, a Liberty Ship carrying a number of our men and equipment pulled into Naples Harbor. The ship had sailed past Tunisia, then stopped 24 hours at Malta. From there they travelled to Augusta, Sicily where they stayed for 24 hours. On the 22nd of October they docked in Naples Harbor. Just then, the air raids started. The men were ordered below decks. It was on this same night that the 48th had its first air raid alert. Men ran through the areas warning everyone to take to their foxholes. Soon there were red lights moving slowly into the sky. Then they were joined by more, and there were dull booms as 90mm ack-ack opened up. The Germans were reaching for the fleet that was laying outside of Naples. Although, the raid was not in Caserta, the men stayed in their holes and watched the show.

After the raid, the Battalion began to bolster air defense. A passive air defense was set up. Signals were given for men to have warning to get into their holes and camouflage inspections were made.

The next day, two enemy aircraft resembling Spitfires, strafed the first platoon of Company C. Fortunately, a few minutes before, the men had left their trucks and had a chance to get in a small defilade before the planes passed on their strafing sweep. The platoon was badly scared; a few of the men were banged up in their hurried attempt to make for cover. Fortunately none of the platoon had been killed for only a few yards away several soldiers and civilians lay dead. Pfc. McAuliff Company C's aid man who was with the platoon, was the first aid man in the 48th to administer first aid under fire.

The 48th was at this time, piling up mines and a mine dump had been established at Caserta. Captain Van Campen found a fuzed 536 pound bomb and loaded it on his jeep. He had to drive miles over bumpy roads and passed through narrow trails with race course traffic, and under constant air attacks that had everyone worried. But he drove right into the dump and had the bomb unloaded. He even offered to go back and get the rest of them, but his efforts weren't appreciated.

The 48th was prepared for combat with all sorts of codes. Telephone talks were kept in code and all reports to group were heavily coded. One report so confused Group Headquarters that several people along the line were thoroughly bawled out and ended with a Group order that all criticism of the Battalions would only be made by the Group Commander and his Executive.

The clerks of S-1 were demoralized. When the equipment convoy finally came in, one small black file box was missing. It seemed as though the Colonel was continually asking for papers that had somehow been left in that little black box. Eventually the Colonel would ask the sergeant-major in a polite tone, "Do you have this paper, sergeant, or is it in the little black box?" Then one day the box turned up, and S-1 didn't have any excuse for missing papers.

The nights were unusually dark in the total blackout of Caserta. Sergeant Turpe was fumbling through the dark line of tents one night to locate the guard post to pass some special orders to the guard on duty. Sergeant Turpe had several stock expressions that were to be expected in any major or minor calamity, and when he tripped over a tent rope in the darkness, he called out angrily, "Holy Moses."

The guard standing in the darkness answered, "Advance, Moses and be recognized."

After a usual air raid that began each night of early November, the Battalion planned a move to Alvignano the following day.

At Alvignano the rains began. Italian rain is a strange thing. We were used to storms that would last for three or four days, but Italian rain would last for months. The rain would pound itself into the ground in large drops, and then it would slacken off into a fine drizzle that would steam the ground and form a haze over the valleys. Then perhaps for an hour or two, it would be damp and wet. The sun might even come out temporarily, but the moment we removed our raincoats, the storm would begin again. The rain was tough on us, for the engineers worked with the weather. A few days of Italian rain would turn a road into a vast mudhole, where each passing vehicle would slosh brown muddy water over us as we swept the shoulders for mines, or attempted to fill the potholes with mud. The endless rows of passing trucks would hit the holes with each wheel and dig out a little bit more of the slushy mud until after a few days of traffic, the holes would be deep and large.

Perhaps no one suffered more from the weather than the engineers in Italy, for they were constantly out in the rain. There were daylong patrols in the rain, and there were many night jobs, too. We would be soaked when we came in, for the Army raincoats would only hold off the water for a little while, and then it would pass through the seams and the worn spots. We couldn't keep our feet dry, because our two pairs of shoes were soaked in mud and water, and it would take days to dry them, even if we had dry days.

Lt. Reardon's platoon of Charlie Company was given a tough assignment for green engineers while at Alvignano. They went up front to assist the 120th Engineers in clearing mines for the 179th Infantry Regiment. The first platoon reported to the 120th by 0330 and was under three bombing attacks at 0830, 0925, and at 1010. Corporal Kot injured his leg jumping off the truck to take cover in one of the attacks. The next day the platoon worked under machine gun and rifle fire to remove mines, but there were no casualties.

The first platoon moved in on the following day with Baker Company of the 120th to build a culvert so that tanks could pass forward. The sound of picks was picked up at an enemy listening post, and the men worked under 88 fire for some time. The first platoon moved into Venafro and began to clear mines for the Fourth Ranger Battalion, while the third platoon of Charlie Company traveled to Pouzouli to clear mines there. Both platoons bivouaced under heavy German fire. The first platoon removed mines along the newly taken roads around the hot-spot at Venafro, while the second platoon kept the only Fifth Army bridge across the Volturno open to traffic throughout five days of rain. The second platoon clearing mines from the river bed, removed the bodies of American infantrymen who had been killed by S-mines in the water. The third platoon was under constant shell fire as they worked near Pouzouli. Pvt. Anderson, and Pvt. Milkovich were wounded by shrapnel in the Charlie Company area while they were eating noon chow. Pvt. Milkovich was scratched under the eye, and the fact that he was eating probably saved his life. He had just raised his full canteen cup to drink when a shell came in and the flying shrapnel passed completely through his canteen cup and cut his face below his eye.

The whole company was under fire at the time and during the day shells were coming into their area. Charlie Company was getting battle-conditioned fast. Air raids were frequent; there were several enemy planes sighted daily. Company C fired at one plane at 0930, and watched smoke pour from another at 1630. Charlie Company could never prove that their small arms had brought down the plane, but there were half a hundred witnesses to the fact that the Messerschmidt 249 went off smoking. Charlie Company was given a probable.

The other Companies soon sent platoons to relieve the platoon of Company C that was working with the 120th Engineer Combat Battalion. It was November 23rd near Venafro that the 3rd platoon of Company B was thus engaged clearing mines from a field in which four men had lost their lives and three others had each lost one of their legs. This was the first real mine field that this platoon had encountered and the going was really tough.

About 40 mines had been removed without a mishap, until Cpl. Seabolt stepped on an S-mine. He was hurled about four feet into the air and landed in the hole that once held the S-mine he had stepped on.

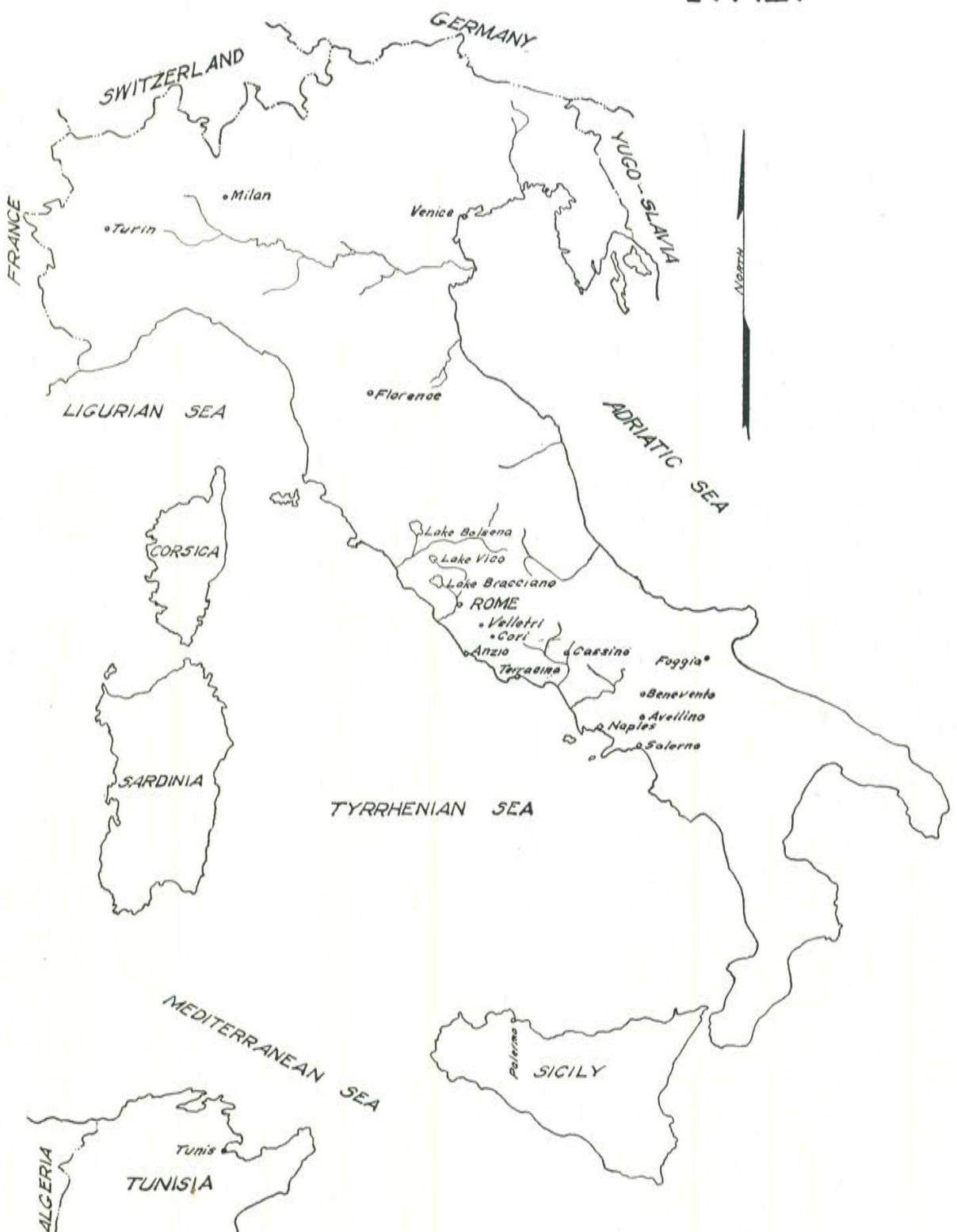
Pfc. O'Neil, Company B's aid man, dashed into the field and found three men laying on the ground. Two of the men were hurt. Cpl. Seabolt, had lost his leg below the knee. O'Neil quickly applied a tourniquet and administered first aid. Seabolt made the remark, "I have always been so careful and now this has to happen." O'Neil then left the minefield to get a litter and upon returning placed Seabolt on the litter with the help of S/Sgt. Reeves.

The next day Sgt. Metcalf entered the minefield at the same spot used in the evacuation of Seabolt and also stepped on a mine, losing his leg at the knee. O'Neil said, "I can't understand how I missed stepping on the mine that Metcalf stepped on as I was in and out of the field at least three times."

Baker Company was then relieved by the 1st platoon of Able Company. The first evening Able Company got its first taste of enemy air action. There was a wild scramble for foxholes. Fortunately no one was hurt.

The next morning, the platoon went to work in the same minefield which had taken such a deadly toll. Everything was working smoothly until the mine-clearing team of Cpl. Campbell and T/5 Di Polo came to a gully. Cpl. Campbell, who was carrying the mine detector, started down the gully with Di Polo some yards behind. Suddenly a loud explosion was heard by the men working on other end of the minefield. All were stunned for a moment but quickly summed up the situation and rushed over to where the explosion had occurred. Upon arriving, they found DiPolo, who had been hit by small pieces of shrapnel from the S-mine, holding his eyes and head and they heard the cries of Campbell in the gully. Pfc. Boye, Able Company's aid man, started down to aid Campbell but Lt. Snyder brushed him aside, dashed down and picked Campbell up and started to carry him out of the gully. It was a tough job and Boye had to assist in getting Campbell up the slope. It was then that they found that Campbell's right leg was blown off at the knee and in addition had suffered severe internal injuries. Boye injected morphine to ease the pain and then dressed the wounds. Just then an ambulance happened to be passing and they loaded the wounded man into it. The next morning Campbell died.

ITALY



While at Alvignano, the opportunity was given to many of us to visit the ruins of Pompeii. Mt. Vesuvius had been erupting for a couple of days so there was an air of expectancy that we were going to see a sight that would take us back many centuries. When we were past Naples we could see that the fields and trees had taken on a greyish overcoat from the lava dust that was sifting down like a snowfall. On arriving at Pompeii, the people were busy cleaning the streets of the lava dust so that the dust wouldn't get ahead of them. About every four feet they had piles two and a half feet wide and as high as it could be piled up.

The pizzors were doing a great business selling soap and water to soldiers that were coming from all over the country. It was far too uncomfortable to run around without washing oneself.

We decided to walk toward the mountains so that we could see the lava which was flowing from the crater. All along the way Italians, almost in panic, were hurrying down the mountain carrying whatever they could, because their mud brick houses were dangerously close to the lava flow.

From the places where we were standing we could see the trees and shrubs burst into flames as the slowly creeping mass of hot seething lava advanced. The whole spectacle gave us an eerie feeling for we could see that the volcano that covered up old Pompeii was attempting to cover up new Pompeii in the present time.

We then made our way back to visit old Pompeii. The city was a remarkable feat of architecture, lavishly built with Mt. Vesuvius as the scenic background. The homes and public buildings, despite the centuries that had past, still had visible signs of lavishness, beautiful paintings, intriguing mosaic tiles, and formal gardens. It was enlightening to see their public baths with the built-in lockers, steam rooms and practically all the so-called modernistic flourishes. The amphitheatre with the underground tunnels and chambers with pens for the lions, their stadium, in fact all their buildings added up to a city that would be the envy of any modern city of such a small population.

Pompeii had been a city steeped in wine, women, and lava. An integral part of the city was the oldest house of prostitution known. The city seemed to have worshipped passion as their god.

Before leaving we went to new Pompeii and had a delicious spaghetti dinner which we washed down with ciderish wine.

Next came Ailano. The rains which we had first experienced at Alvignano continued with constant showers so that everything was a squeamish boggy mass. Daily, a reading was kept of the water gauge; the Volturno River was rising treacherously high. It was there we became so used to frequent calls of Col. Musgraves of VI Corps to check a bridge that had been washed out. Off we'd go in a mad haste to check.

Once S-3 pulled a boner. They wrote a message to Company C to take care of the "Bride" of Amorosi. The little letter "g" had been omitted. What a disappointed bunch of soldiers when they found that the bride turned out to be a bridge. But S-2 was not to be outdone even in boners. They ordered 13 maps 1 : 50,000 No. 172 III. Major Winger of Group Headquarters sent a sardonic note. "This is all water; do you plan some amphibious operations?" The result, S-3 was always being ribbed on the Bride of Amorosi and S-2 questioned on their Amphibious Operations.

While at Ailano, a few hospital jobs came in. The dashing Engineer Officers were learning to appreciate the talented American Nurses.

On Thanksgiving Day, the Battalion took a day off for celebration. All three companies had been working hard, and their combat experiences were mounting up. They passed through the first big test. Each of the Companies celebrated in their own way, but Charlie Company went out of their way to celebrate the good work done during the past attachment to the Rangers and the 45th Division, and the accomplishments of the difficult task of keeping the heavy ponton bridge in and operating under flood conditions at the Volturno. Charlie Company requisitioned a school house and had an Italian Orchestra for music, and were served Thanksgiving dinner by a group of pretty signorinas. Their menu was: Turkey, Celery, Olives, Brown Gravy, Apples, Nuts, and Dressing, topped off with twenty gallons of Vino. In spite of all this, Col. Goodpaster found some men to pin on the red and white good conduct ribbon.

On the 27th, the 48th moved to the vicinity of Colli, which was then the hottest spot in Italy. The trucks moved into town three at a time widely spaced in case of shellfire so that there would be a minimum of casualties. While the convoy was passing through the town, the Germans opened up with a forty minute barrage that caused many of the truck groups to stop and place the vehicles under shelter of the rows of houses. Shells were landing within fifty yards of the men, but there were no casualties. A German observation post was in plain view and the German patrols were continually slipping through the hills and moving around the town. Only the previous evening, a Jerry patrol had been captured, carrying enough explosives to blow the main bridge in the area sky-high. In order that the German patrols wouldn't pass through, a machine gun was dragged up 456 steps to the abandon flue of an electrical plant. It took the gunners more than an hour to tassel the machine gun and mount up the steps.

It was during this move past Colli that S/Sgt. Dawkins, Sgt. Boulas, Pvt. Thomas, and Pvt. Ramsay were in the armored half-track when six Jerry planes came swooping low over the horizon, searching out artillery pieces. Ramsay stopped the half-track short and he and Sgt. Dawkins took to a ditch. Thomas on the 30 cal machine gun and Boulas on the 50 Cal machine gun, opened up. They could see the swastikas plainly as the planes swooped swirled, and went into their dives. Boulas in the excitement after unloading his first belt fed the machine gun so that the rounds were facing him. Realizing what an exposed position he and Thomas were in, he jumped into the drivers' seat and drove off the road to where they had some cover. The planes made a sudden turn around and made a bee-line toward their own lines. Two of the planes were trailing smoke.

As a jeep passed by, Boulas, badly frightened, quickly jumped from his vehicle and waved two fingers excitedly at the jeep to indicate that two planes had been shot down, meanwhile shouting the news. As the jeep passed he noticed that there was a general in it who was none too pleased and somewhat puzzled that he had not received the salute due him. S/Sgt. Dawkins and Ramsey told Thomas and Boulas that their fire had been directed on the same plane, so they accounted for but one of the two planes.

The password was absolutely essential in the blackout darkness. Anyone walking outside without the word was taking his life in his hands. The patrol activities had the guards at a triggers' edge, and they would not hesitate to challenge anything that looked curious in the gloom. On the first night in the area, Major Fullerton, Executive Officer, stepped out of his shack to go toward the latrine. He had not taken more than a dozen steps, than a guard's strident "Halt" - - "Arkansas" stopped the major in his tracks. The Major was a bit flustered and answered "Train" instead of the correct countersign, "Traveler". The guard called "Arkansas" again, and his bolt snapped back. The Major shouted, "Don't shoot me, I'm Major Fullerton. Ask Sergeant Tschetters or Sergeant Tuerpe, they know me!"

Sergeant Tschetters, who was just outside the door called, "I don't know you in the dark." The guard told the Major, "Better go back inside and don't come out again around here until you know the password." The Major obeyed.

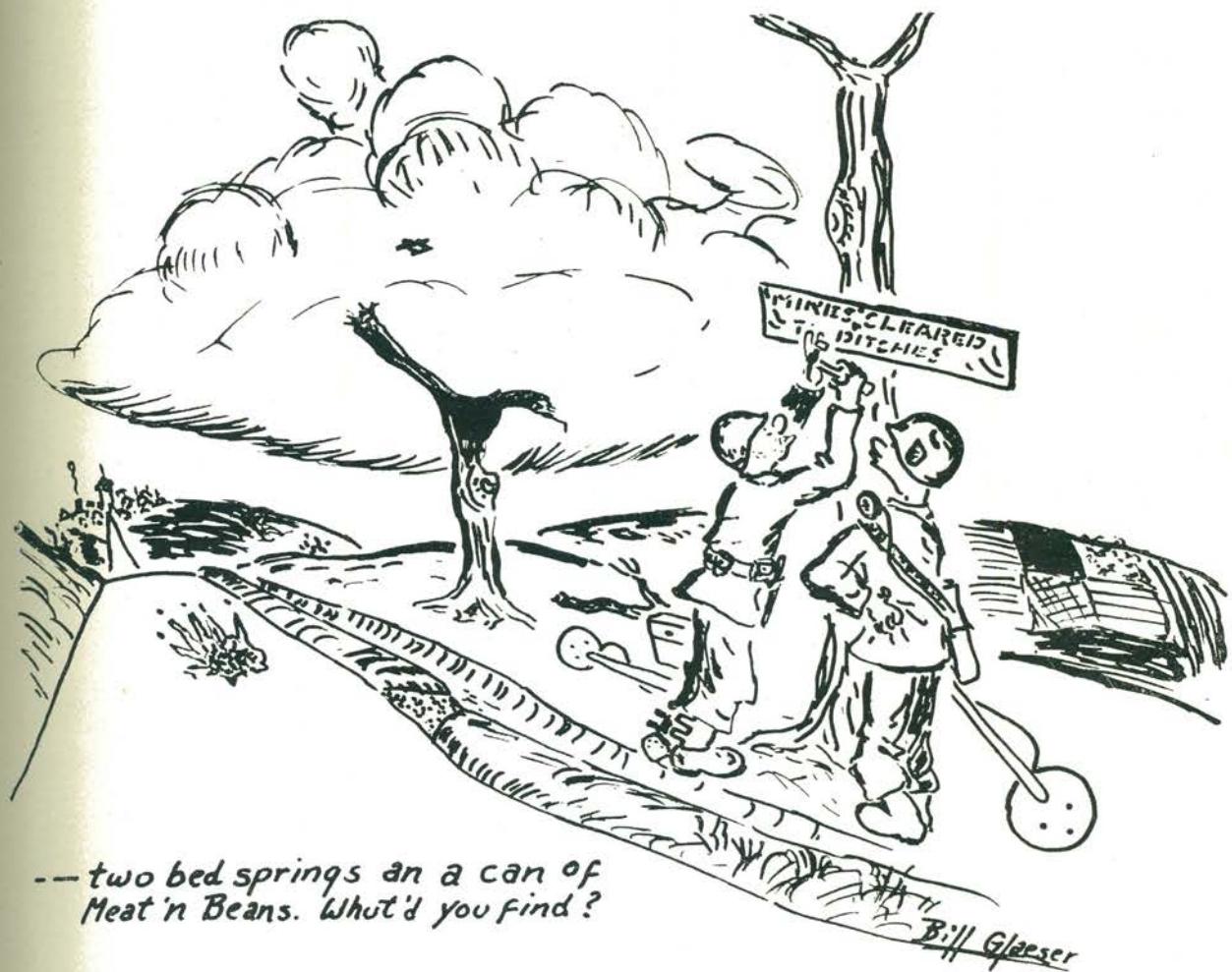
On November 29th, Charlie Company was assigned the construction of a 130 foot Bailey Bridge at Colli. By the following day at 1400 it was completed, and a group of Fifth Army photographers came to the site and had the men re-enact some of the scenes in putting the bridge across the Volturno. The scenes might be used in the Fifth Army picture "The Road To Rome," the cameramen told them.

The bridge was named the "Ritter Bridge" after the only death suffered by the 48th during the Volturno operations. A sign was painted and hung on both approaches of the 34th Division bridge.

At 0100 on the first of December, the 48th was relieved its attachment with VI Corps under the 1108 Engr Combat Group, and by the third of December, elements of the companies were working towards the town of Mignano. Just outside of town, seven German aircraft jumped a Piper Cub that was being used for artillery observation, and two elements of two companies fired small arms at the enemy aircraft. The Piper Cub headed for the ground and escaped down the valley as the German planes dove on it. The town of Mignano was being pounded by both sides and the sound of small arms fire came from each side of the hill in the valley. For some reason or another, the Germans seemed determined to hold this valley. A squad, assigned to guard a small bridge below Mignano, carried

machine guns and set them up. They were instructed to be on the lookout for three German soldiers disguised as padres who were specializing in blowing bridges in that area.

Enemy artillery shelled the spot constantly, trying to hit the bridge. The Companies were working with artillery and many shells were falling in their areas. Charlie Company CP moved into a cave so that the reserve platoon could get some sleep. A number of men had shredded pup tents already. In all, the town of Mignano looked like a very hot spot.



CHAPTER IV

HIGHWAY 48

The 48th began to work their way through the valley towards Mignano. To the left, one stubborn hill presented a major obstacle to the Fifth Army, but it was given a thorough saturation by artillery fire, and then it was stormed by infantry. The hill, Mt. Camino, became known as the "million dollar" hill for over a million dollars worth of artillery shells was needed to drive the Germans from its crest.

Enemy aircraft was extremely active over the valley. There were strafing sorties almost every hour, and the men of the 48th would dive from the roads and open up with their M-1 rifles. It seemed as though the planes were always there, and after a while, the men began to get a thrill out of banging away with a clip at each strafing plane.

During the early days of December, the Germans hung to Mignano, but by the seventh, the town was fairly cleared of small arms fire. The Germans were sitting on the second tip of Mt. Lungo, only a thousand yards away with mortars, and German patrols crossed the railroad tracks to the left to penetrate into a small valley between the town and Highway Six. Now and then a mortar shell would cough into town or along the road. One shell broke into a bank below town where Sergeant Robert Williams and six men were gathered. Although the sergeant was knocked flat by concussion, and the shell landed in the midst of his men, no one was injured.

At 1100 hours on December 13th, the 48th opened a forward command post in the remains of a small hotel along Highway Six not far from the town of Mignano. There were about twenty tall trees scattered around the grounds all prepared for demolition, and there was a lot of demolition scattered about the ground, along with a great number of enemy mortar shells and mines. Enemy planes gave the forward CP quite a workout during the next day. First, at 0945, twelve Messerschmidt 109s gave the buildings a plastering, before the ack-ack opened up and drove them away. Around noon, the men were trying to clean up the refuse left behind by Italian soldiers, who had used the buildings during the night, when ten more enemy planes appeared. One of the planes dropped low behind the buildings and raced in toward the kitchen. He opened up with his machine guns and powdered the walls of the kitchen and the rooms adjacent to it.

At four in the afternoon, the planes came back again and raced up and down Highway Six beside the CP, shooting at anything they saw. All during the afternoon, shells were hitting in the northern

end of Mignano, and a few were falling along the railroad line that ran past the side of the CP building. Late in the afternoon, a German burp pistol was heard beyond the railroad embankment. The communications section and S-3 with a few Italian soldiers grabbed their rifles and crawled out to the embankment to attempt to reach the Germans. Although a thorough search was made, the pistol was not heard again. During the night, the guard was doubled, for it was feared that the burp gunner was part of a patrol that may have worked his way behind the CP.

Major Fullerton, Battalion Engineer, was coming from the Charlie Company Bailey Bridge below Mignano the following day when seven enemy planes dipped low over the highway on a strafing run. Private Woodcox, his driver, stopped the command car and both ran for cover. The Major tripped and fractured his knee cap.



On the 13th of December, the Medical Detachment came up to the forward CP. They were welcomed with a hot reception of 88s and the Medics rushed from their trucks for the nearest shell holes. The Medics weren't familiar with the lay of the land, and they were under fire for the first time. Captain Dixie Snider, the Battalion Surgeon, rushed wildly around the small field behind the CP buildings amid the bursting shells, looking vainly for a hole that was unoccupied. Everyone was directing him from his hole and the doctor was fast getting confused. Eventually, he spied a rather deep hole and dove in. It was the forward CP's latrine.

On December 15th, the Operations Sergeant, was alone in S-3. Lieutenant Schowalter was inspecting the Bailey Bridge below Mignano and Colonel Goodpaster had left for Naples to visit Major Fullerton, who was in the hospital. Suddenly, the telephone rang, and Major Winger of 1108th Group excitedly announced, "Make the railroad from G-992111 to G-923150 passable for two way, class 40 traffic without delay. The road will be needed in six days." The Sergeant grabbed Private Woodcox and his command car and started down the road to catch the Colonel. He found the Colonel at the first bridge below Mignano, raced hurriedly up to him, and gave him the message.

Engineers have built hundreds of roads, but the strangest of all was Highway 48, the express highway, built from Mignano to Cassino over the old railroad. Although the 48th was ordered to have the six mile road open in six days, at the time, four or more miles of it were in German hands.

Colonel Goodpaster, Captain Busch, the Intelligence Officer, and Lieutenant Schowalter, the Operations Officer, spent most of that night meticulously studying maps and aerial photographs which revealed the obstacles ahead. It did not take them long to realize the magnitude of the job. It was the night's study that decided Colonel Goodpaster on his plan of action. His Charlie Company Commander was Captain Van Campen. Captain Van Campen thrived on jobs which would shatter the nerve of most men. He had helped his Charlie Company build a reputation which had spread like wild-fire. When tankers or artillery units would need engineers they would specifically request Charlie Company of the 48th. The Colonel made Captain Van the Battalion Engineer for the job.

Also two other officers in the Battalion had special training on the Bailey Bridge which would be used to great advantage. They were Lieutenant Finnegan of Able Company and Lieutenant Schowalter, the Operations Officer. Colonel Goodpaster directed that these two be at the bridge sites through the entire operations so that they could give the Company Commanders any technical advice needed.

The Germans had done everything possible to make sure the railroad would never be used by the Allied Armies pressing up the Cassino Valley. They had used a special railroad car with a large hook which was dragged under the ties behind a train. The hook dug deep into the earth below the ties like a huge plow, and ripped the ties and rails from the bed and flung them away from the road site bed. Then tellermines had been buried along the right-of-way. Every bridge and culvert had been blown and mines sprinkled liberally on all of the approaches. Enemy patrols used the embankment for a path during the nights, and the whole embankment was an enemy stronghold all the way into Cassino from a couple of hundred yards from the CP buildings. The usual group of fourteen Messerschmidt 109s made their appearance and circled above the CP buildings and Highway Six and made several strafing runs into the area. In the afternoon, there was a quick flurry of messages as the Companies were ordered to assemble in the vicinity of Mignano, and the road and bridge maintenance assignments were dropped. S-4 was ordered to prefabricate a culvert and have it ready for Able Company to install at first light in the morning. A group from Able Company was sent with gasoline saws, to cut away the trees that had been blown across the road below the CP.

This was the first experience with gasoline saws in combat. T/5 Hobert started the saw. It wasn't long before the men working there hit the ground. Evidently the Germans had heard the noise of the

saw and laid down the barrage. The saw was quickly shut off. The trees were then removed by hand cross-cut saws and axes; the sound from this method did not carry so far.

It would almost be a days work to reach the railroad from the CP, for trees had been blown across the road, and there was a large crater where the culvert had been demolished when the Germans retreated.

The following morning, Able Company working on the first small culvert reported that ten feet more were urgently needed. S-4 had no trucks available, but the culvert was manufactured and reached Able Company by 1300 in the afternoon, and the culvert was completed. During the day, Colonel Goodpaster pushed his reconnaissance past the Infantry outposts as far as he possibly could. The following report of the recon was forwarded to the 1108th Group, "Railroad beyond Bailey Bridge site at 974124 under intermittent, observed artillery, mortar and automatic weapons fire. Blown bridge at 960130 requires high-level Bailey Bridge approximately 110 feet. Blown bridge at 957132 required one span medium level Bailey Bridge approximately 100 feet long. Enemy minefield located at G-982123. Fifteen number 4 tellermines removed from field pattern. Distance between rows --- five yards. Complete field not removed but marked with tape."

The 48th was beginning to appreciate the size of the job that had been cut out for them to complete in six days.

Meanwhile, Second Corps had informed the 48th that the Express Highway was to be used mainly by British vehicles, so a British Major Campbell of the British Liason was consulted. The British were optimistic about the power of their trucks. Although the road was constructed according to the estimates and figures that he gave, a number of the British vehicles still had to be winched up the steep grades.

The next morning as the men began to work towards the minefield, they noticed an Italian woman moving down the tracks on a mule. She approached to the white tape, but crossed on the wrong side. The men were 300 yards away, but they began to shout and run towards her. She became frightened and couldn't understand that the men were trying to keep her away from the minefield. All of a sudden, there was a cloud of black smoke and a thundering explosion. When the men reached the site there was nothing in the field but a large hole. The woman and her mule had completely disappeared.

Baker Company was chosen for the first major obstacle in the railbed. Able Company had completed their culvert, and the road had progressed to a cratered bridge site. There was a gap of 345 feet, which was 48 feet above a small stream which crossed below. The embankments on each side led steeply down to the stream, and on the far approach the earth had been heaped into a mound. Here was a problem, for the British had said, that their "lorries" would not pass over more than a twenty percent grade. Baker Company had a tough assignment even if they could take their time, but this was a rush job which would have to be completed less than 600 yards from the Infantry outpost line.

The high piles of earth would be a job for the bulldozers, but never before had bulldozers been brought up to work close enough for the enemy to hit them with a well-aimed rifle shot. It meant that the big machines would have to work under observed artillery, mortar and even small arms fire to complete the fill. Highway 48 was a hot spot. The Germans knew what the 48th was trying to do, and every time a group of ten or more men appeared, it was a signal for an artillery barrage. The Germans, perched on mountains on both sides and high hills 600 yards in front of the bridge site, had a clear view of the road and everything that passed over it from the CP buildings at Mignano to the bridge site about a mile down the road. The bulldozer operators knew what they were in for. The men who worked the dozers knew that they could not hear a shell above the roar of the motor. There was no warning; they would sit tight and take whatever came. A bulldozer could pass through the biggest barrage, and the man on top would not have the slightest idea what was happening. The dozer operator sat over six feet from the ground. The cab is an open space with a large seat, from which the operator controls several handles that move the blade and operate the motor. There is no cover, and there is not time to move from the seat at the first whistle of a shell and reach the ground by the time the shell explodes - even if the operator did hear the first faint warning whistle. The dozer operators prepared to work at night, realizing full well the task that lay ahead of them. Once they were in the driver's seat, there would be no retreat. They would move about in spite of anything that came in.

Obstacles Along Highway 48



Captain Van Campen called T/4 Godell and T/5 Gularate into his office and outlined the work that would have to be done at the site. Gularate and Godell looked at each other and moved over to their big tractors. They checked the big machines carefully, tried the motors, and moved them out before the CP buildings to await darkness. Meanwhile, Highway 48 was taking its usual pounding. The dozer operators could hear the heavy shells crunching on the road where Baker Company was working. Each bulldozer was going to have a machine gun squad for protection in case any German patrols crossed along the highway during the night, but there was no protection at all from shellfire. At 1930 it was dark enough. Sergeant Schreiner and Lieutenant Haley of Baker Company moved ahead of the bulldozers to guide them through the darkness and the machine gun squads fell in behind them. The Germans heard the noise as the two tractors moved up the highway and began to reach for them with aerial bursts at the rate of 8 every 15 minutes. The operators sat tight, high above the ground, and the big machines moved steadily toward the Infantry line. The men worried about the sparking exhaust of the tractors and word was passed out that the fire would get more accurate when the Germans could spot the flashes in the darkness. The two big tractors crossed over a steep grade and slithered along the railroad ties and caught hold.

The Germans kept reaching for the big tractors with their artillery but most of it was fifty yards or more wide.

The dozers reached the embankment and began work, while the two machine gun squads found positions and set up their guns. The Infantry, squatting in their holes three hundred yards away, could see the big tractors stand high on their heels, groan, and then disappear into the crater again. Apparently the Germans could, too. Godell's dozer became mired in the mud at the creek bottom and Lieutenant Jonah moved up the embankment to bring Gularate's dozer down to push it out. Godell climbed out of the cab and lay on the ground. Only then was he conscious of the shellfire. He heard the screaming whistles and saw a cluster of shells break a hundred yards behind Gularate, as he stood up in his seat to talk to Lieutenant Jonah. Gularate moved his tractor down the side of the embankment and dropped behind Godell. Together they applied the full power of their motors, and with a roar, Godell moved out of the creek bottom and began to clank up the fifty feet of embankment on the far side. A new burst of shells dropped on the road, and the shrapnel thudded into the embankments, but Godell and Gularate didn't see the other men fall flat. Godell saw a group of red dots moving towards him and sat frozen in his seat as he suddenly realized that they were machine gun tracers. He was six feet off the ground, and fought to conquer an inner urge to dive headfirst for the ground. He dug his blade into the earth, swung up the embankment again, and headed right into the tracers.

Gularate, working on the other bank, couldn't hear the tracers, but he sat spellbound and watched them. In a crouched position he stayed in his seat, keeping the huge machine at its task while the tracers flew viciously over his head.

Meanwhile, unknown to the two operators, one of the machine gun squads had spotted a German patrol, moving towards the two bulldozers. The squad spread out, and the riflemen found positions and prepared to defend the bulldozers. The machine gunner squinted down his sights and waited for the patrol to come within a sure range. The bulldozers grunted and roared behind them as the German patrol spread out, and began to work toward the noise. The minutes passed endlessly, as the squad lay tensely on the ground with fingers tight on their triggers. A dozen times the machine gunner sighted down the barrel and felt the belt nervously. One of the nearby riflemen stirred, and the sound echoed like a thunderstorm across to the gunner. The German patrol was getting closer now. The men could make out some details through the darkness. A cluster of shells broke in close to the dozers, and a star shell broke over the front lines. The patrol froze. When the gunner sighted down the barrel again, the patrol was moving off. He tightened his finger on the trigger, and waited the signal to fire. But none came. The German patrol moved off unmolested.

Back on the embankment a shell had landed in close to Godell, and Sergeant Schreiner rushed in. He was sure that Godell had been hit, but the tractor roared, and Godell apparently did not even realize that the shell had landed. He dug a big bite out of the crest of the hill and nosed it down the slope. The German machine gun opened up again, and a burst came low over Gularate's dozer.

Lieutenant Jonah looked at his watch. It was getting near three in the morning, and the men had been under continuous shellfire for over eight hours. Godell had finished the far embankment, and was teetering his bulldozer down the slope to help Gualarte with the tough mound of the near embankment. Together the bulldozers heaved the earth down and scraped at the bank. In a short while, it was completed, and the two tractors started back down the highway. The two squads were called in, and the party crossed to the railroad and followed the tractors. It was three-thirty in the morning, and the job was done.

The following morning, Baker Company moved to the site that had been prepared by the bulldozers during the night. The site was deep in a defilade which the bulldozers had graded into a slope to the stream below. Baker Company felt safe. They would be working far below the embankment level, and they thought that only extremely accurate shellfire could reach them. Their first job was to prepare the site with demolition, and the first platoon spread out with the call of "Fire in the Hole." The charge heaved dirt and rock from the creek bottom. One large rock hit Private Wykle in the back and knocked off his helmet. Another rock hit him in the head, and flung him senseless to the ground. He was given first aid and retired to the rear.

A pier had to be built on the far shore embankment to make it level with the bridge site, so the men were spread out while a small crew went to the embankment and began work. By noon it was completed, and the bridge trucks began to haul parts for the 110 foot span. The Germans saw the trucks moving up the road, and dropped a smoke shell right on the near embankment into the defilade. The men scattered wildly and hit the ground. A few seconds later, a barrage opened up on Baker Company and pinned the men to the ground.

It was some time before the men could begin to get the bridge parts and start to carry them down the hill. It was a tough job, but by evening, the bridge was almost ready for traffic. This bridge was named the Siebold Bridge after Corporal Siebold, who was the first casualty in Baker Company.

While Baker Company was working on the first major obstacle, Able and Charlie Companies were moving around the site to their work further along the route. Able Company was assigned a blown overpass over a small donkey trail, and they began to fill the gap with a culvert. Charlie Company was assigned a tough Bailey Bridge up ahead, and Able Company accomplished reconnaissance yet on another bridge site further on.

By 1930, the Baker Company bridge was 90 per cent complete. Over 110 rounds had fallen around the site and on the road during the building, but there had been no battle casualties. The worst injury was Private Wykle's, for Kreuzer and O'Neil of Baker Medics had to carry him on a litter over three miles through bursting shellfire to the Third Division Clearing Station.

During the day, Colonel Goodpaster and Lieutenant Schowalter had pushed their reconnaissance ahead of the Infantry outposts and had reached the foot of Mt. Lungo, one of the greatest German strong-points in the Cassino Valley. The Colonel and Lieutenant were pinned down by machine gun and automatic weapons fire and had to beat a hasty retreat on all fours. Lieutenant Schowalter had a close shave when a bullet snapped a small sapling less than a foot from him.

The 36th Division could not believe that the road was progressing through "No Man's Land," and tried to help all that they could with all of the information that they possessed. Colonel Harris of the Liason Section would go over the reports of the liason officers with men of the 48th in order to give them all of the information at his disposal. Colonel Crowther of G-3, would go over the patrol reports and outline the enemy strongpoints in the area. A record of minefields was kept on a large mine map, and the latest information was marked daily, so that the engineers working far up on the road would know every possible scrap of information.

This was the German Winter Line, and the Germans intended to hold Cassino and the surrounding country for the winter. They were making nightly boasts over the radio that they would succeed. They made the ground almost impregnable. Every knoll was a strongpoint, and they were lavish with artillery. The mine map was a maze, for they had gone to no end to make the advance of the Americans as costly as possible. The 48th had already located one large minefield and taped it. A short time later, another outfit moved into the field nearby, and suffered several mine casualties.



Seabolt Bridge

Sergeant Torigian, who was bringing supplies to Charlie Company's working party ahead of Baker's uncompleted Bailey, swung around the embankment with his truck and became mired in the mud. He carried his winch cable to the far side of the site and fastened it to a tree and then winched himself out. Three days later, a signal party, laying wire, followed his tracks and in the same spot where Torigian had been stuck, four of them were killed when a mine exploded.

The major obstacles had been assigned numbers and at each major obstacle a telephone had been installed, so that trips through the shellfire to the CP would be cut to a minimum. Sergeant Treloar, working on Number Nine obstacle, the Charlie Company Bridge Site, could not find a sheltered spot for the phone, so it was placed in a nearby field. A man was kept at the telephone for a while, and then all hands were necessary on the job. The Sergeant would try to replace the man as soon as possible, but it seemed as though every time he would mention the word "phone," it would be a signal for a German barrage. After he had tried unsuccessfully several times to get a man on the phone, he decided that he had better take the phone himself.

It was just after evening chow that Charlie Company started down Highway 48. The men longed to talk to one another, but their orders were to keep 10 paces apart. Silently, they continued down. The men had not as yet been told what their job would be. But they did know that they were going to the most forward end of the highway to work. They were carrying their machine guns and bazookas, ready to set up defensive positions. Night was fast approaching.

Back in the Battalion Headquarters excitement was high. A flash message had been received that the Germans were launching a strong counter-attack down Highway 48 tonight. Would Charlie Company be cut off? Plans were quickly changed. Charlie Company would not do the job tonight. Captain Schowalter grabbed the phone, "Corporal Mallen, hurry get me Last Lap!" If he could contact Last Lap, which was the most forward point where we had a phone, Charlie Company could be stopped. "Sorry Sir," answered Mallen, "No answer from Last Lap." "Mallen, keep ringing and let me know the second you contact them." Captain Schowalter then hollered to his Sergeant, "I'm grabbing a jeep to try and stop them before it is too late. You keep on the phone." Private Boyd and the Captain dashed out of the office.

S/Sgt. Treloar, who was in charge of the second platoon, was well forward with his men when he got orders to have the men lay down where they were. The men quickly took to the ground; they had a premonition that they were in for trouble. Treloar then tried to contact the third platoon, but in the darkness, he could not locate them. He reported this to Lieutenant Reardon. Lieutenant Reardon then went silently forward. A little way up, he could dimly make out a platoon of men walking towards him. His first impulse was to call for Sergeant Russell, who was in charge of the missing platoon, but fortunately he did not permit the impulse to get the best of him. Instead he waited silently. He heard a command given softly in German. Since Schowalter had told him that the Germans were counter-attacking in strength, he quickly returned to where Sergeant Treloar was and both of them maneuvered the men out safely.

In the meantime, Mallen had finally contacted Last Lap. Quickly the operator there was told of the attack that was imminent. He was to come back but not until he had contacted Charlie Company. He finally found Sergeant Russell and told him the situation. Russell and his platoon had lost contact with the rest of the company and were at a loss what to do. After searching in the darkness, Russell could not locate the company. He moved his men back to where Supply had a dump located near Battalion Headquarters. Charlie Company was already there.

During this time, the S-4, Supply section was doing a magnificent job, for the road had been considered so unsafe for travel, that telephones had been installed. But the telephones were constantly ringing for supplies, and the S-4 men would ride at all hours during the night or day to dumps far in the rear for the supplies, and then start up the road in their lumbering two and one half ton trucks. The highway was a constant battle of supplies and S-4 continued to win it. No job was too big or too hard for the men of Four. They were the supply doctors always alert for any emergency.

TEAMWORK

First came the minesweepers, moving over the railroad with fixed bayonets on rifles, and mine detectors on the flank. Then came the demolition men who were breaking the rails with small charges so that they could be removed. Following them was the bulldozer. Charlie Company had found a path around the Baker Company site and moved the bulldozer down the steep embankment, across the small stream, and back up on the railroad again. Amid occasional shells, the dozer began to hack at the railbed and fill in the shell holes and craters that dotted the old railroad up to their bridge site, Obstacle 8.

It was raining now, to make a tough job even more miserable. The men were constantly wet and small deceptive holes might turn out to be a shell crater, causing a man to almost disappear if he fell into one of them.

Lt. Kratch was thankful for the wet ground that turned the road bed into a sticky mass. One shell exploded about five feet from him but he was not touched by shrapnel. The wet ground allowed the shell to penetrate the extra few inches that probably saved his life.

The shelling continued at the site with an occasional, sudden barrage that was intended for the parties. Cpl. Coyer and his crew had finished their shift, and he had removed his wet shoes and placed them under his head while he tried to get some sleep. A piece of shrapnel penetrated one of his shoes, not more than two inches from his head.

Sergeants Plowman and Specker slipped through the mud to the bridge site to attempt to place the heavy rocking rollers, over which the Bailey would move. The Germans had complete observation of the site. Everytime the men would approach, they were driven off by shell fire.

On the 18th, during the afternoon, the weather broke. The sky cleared and Charlie Company brought their trucks up to the CP buildings at the entrance of the road and waited completion of the Baker Bridge.

Charlie Company brought their bridge train up at dawn on the 19th. By 0600, the men were taking the Bailey panels from the trucks, and dropping them off the road to the embankment in order to keep the road clear. Crews were organized and the men began work. The company worked throughout the day as truck after truck worked its way up the road and the bridging was removed.

The men of Charlie Company had a tough day at the bridge. They reported being hotly shelled four times during the morning, totaling thirty 105mm in the immediate vicinity. Closest hit was approximately 25 yards away. From 1315 to 1330, twenty 105 shells fell in the vicinity. Closest hit was judged to be about 25 yards. Between 1530 and 1545, thirty-seven 105mm shells landed in the vicinity. Closest hit was approximately 45 yards. Shells were judged to be coming from the northern tip of Mt. Lungo.

The 71st Field Artillery Brigade was contacted for counter-battery fire, and the men at work on the sites would report facts of the barrage. S-2 used magnetic azimuths, and aerial photographs to attempt to outguess the Germans and have Field Artillery destroy the guns. Every time a dud landed on Highway 48 the Field Artillery was notified and a man was sent to compute the angle of fire and approximate the location of the gun.

Charlie Company was reporting a lot of shelling during the day as they worked, but as the evening drew on, the German's observation was obscured; the barrages grew less intense. Charlie Company continued to work during the night through harassing fire, and reported their 110 foot bridge ready for traffic by six in the morning, after 24 straight hours of work.

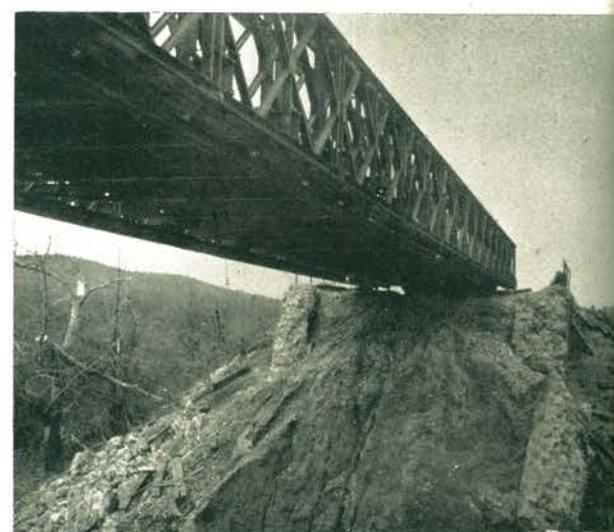
The men were moved to their bivouac area and fell dog-tired into their pup tents. They were told that they would move back on the road again at 1300 in the afternoon.

The weather had played favorites with Charlie Company. After a day of clear weather that had permitted Charlie Company to put their bridge across, the storm settled on Able Company.

It was early morning when Able Company moved out to work on obstacle Nine. All three spans of a former 275 foot railroad bridge had been blown, leaving only the piers partially standing. It would necessitate 80 feet of Double Single Bailey Bridge. The men decided that upon completion of this bridge, they would name it, "Red Campbell's Bridge." It was elected to cut down the steep embankments at both ends of the span and build the bridge in the defile 20 feet above water level. Able Company rode up as far as the Baker bridge site in their trucks and there they had to unload and shoulder what tools they would need and walk the rest of the way. Able Company crossed to the left of the embankment and by-passed the other two companies at work on their bridges, to reach Obstacle Nine. In order to get the bridge down lower in the defile and save work on the cribbing, the abutments had to be blown and the approaches cut down considerably. Fourteen hundred pounds of explosives were used to blow the remaining piers, then bulldozers were moved up to cut down the approaches. The men were glad to have the bulldozers do the work, but as soon as the big cats appeared, it was the signal for a German artillery barrage. The motors of the bulldozers were an automatic signal for several rounds of artillery.

While the bulldozers were cutting down the embankments, the men were sent for large trees to be used as reveting material. There was a small woods across an open field several hundred yards to the left of the highway, and the men carried their axes to the grove. The first several logs were carried safely to the bridge site, but the Germans soon caught on to what the men were doing. Every time the men would start across the open field with a log the Germans would throw a few shells at them. Often the men would have to drop their logs in crossing the field when they heard the whistle of a shell. It took all of the nineteenth and until noon of the twentieth for the men to complete the revetments and fill them in with rock.

Headaches on Highway 48



As was previously mentioned, a check was kept on the number of shells and the area in which they landed. Pfc. Boye, who had the job of timing each shell, said, "The Germans had a set pattern and deviated from it only once. They would always throw a smoke shell followed by high explosives. Some of Able Company's men were eating chow in a large culvert under the road. This culvert was being used by the Infantry as a changing point for their litter bearers that were carrying wounded to the rear. Suddenly a shell landed about 20 feet from the opening, killing an Infantry medic, and wounding two others. Pvt. Marston of Able Company had shrapnel in his right arm, which was so badly fractured and lacerated that he never returned to the unit. The medics there were too stunned by the concussion of the shell to render first aid, so Able Company's aid men were rushed up."

It had rained all during the previous night and through the morning. The freshly turned earth, left by the bulldozers when the grading was completed, was churned into knee-deep mud as the men struggled through it with the heavy bridge parts. The bridge had to be carried piece by piece, up from the field below the bridge site. It was dark before the rollers were in and the building could begin. The Germans had been shelling the ridges along the right during the day, but as Able Company began work, the shells began to break close in on the left. When the men heard the shells coming, they hit the ground and became partially buried in the soft mud. The men were on their feet the moment the shelling had ceased. As night closed in, it became pitch black and two duds landed between the abutments of the bridge. Lt. Munson then phoned the Operations Section and told them he was bringing the men in. Capt. Schowalter, asked "Why?" Just then a shell landed about 20 feet away from Lt. Munson. "That's why," answered Munson. The men had been twenty hours under continuous shellfire, and had worked in mud to their knees the entire day. Every man in the company was soaked and had eaten cold food that entire day. It was too much to ask the men to continue working during the night.

The next morning Able Company moved out early to continue work on the bridge. Due to the heavy rains, the ground around the bridge was a quagmire, so the men had great difficulty in lifting and carrying the various pieces of bridging. Able Company worked without delay and in a relatively short time the bridge was completed.

We had just finished both approaches to the bridge when a direct hit was made on the bridge killing Sgt. Marsink. The shell tore away several chess, damaged two stringers, cut away the sway bracing and damaged one transom.

We had just finished constructing the bridge and were cutting down the approaches when one of the dozers got stuck in the mud. Nothing we did could get it out so we left it there for the night. The next morning we had a T-2 Tank Retriever to help us pull it out. When we arrived there was a mist that clung to the ground and kept the Germans from observing what was going on. Soon after we started working on the problem of getting the dozer out the mist lifted. A smoke shell came in and landed right alongside the T-2. This we knew from long experience was a signal for more to come. The enemy always threw a smoke shell and then followed it with H. E. We also had a D-7 bulldozer there helping the T-2 pull out the mired dozer. When the shell hit beside the T-2 all the personnel were wounded. When the other shells started to come in, it was apparent that the T-2 had attracted the enemy's attention. One of the bulldozer drivers who was there got in the T-2 and drove it off. The Germans then focused their attention on the D-7. Sgt. Moore, who had been there all the time refueling the tractors that were working noticed this, and jumped aboard the dozer and drove it away. While driving the tractor away under intense fire he was wounded and for his voluntary action he was awarded the Silver Star.

The Charlie Company bridge had been completed and Able Company crossed over. The storm had flooded the Baker Company site and the men had to step off the far approach into swirling water up to their waists. The men were so tired when they reached the long grade up from the bridge that some of them actually crawled the last hundred yards uphill on their hands and knees in the mud and water. The Tommies had placed 25-pounders to the right and left of the railroad track. The flash from each gun, after it sounded off, lit up the roadway. The silhouette of men walking with their rifles on one shoulder and their tools on the other is a picture that will live in the minds of many of the men forever.



When the men reached camp there was hot chow waiting for them. Most of the men were so tired that they crawled into their sodden pup tents without eating and were asleep before they hit the ground. Many of the men slept in their wet, muddy clothes that night.

The road wore on the men's nerves. Most every night there was a dozen stories making their way around the companies about the men who had done strange things and had unusual luck. The men began to call the 48th the "Lucky 48th" and wondered how they got away with what they were doing.

Pfc. "Red" White had left his truck on the road while the men unloaded rock, when a sudden barrage found them. Everyone hit the ground and the only casualty was "Red's" truck which had been riddled by the flying shrapnel. Red picked himself up off the ground and looked at the truck. "Hang it," he said, "just when I got the thing all fixed up."

Pfc. Jacobac and Pvt. Milkovich were sent ahead to mark bad spots in the road so the tanks could pass during the night. They advanced up the road a short distance above where Able Company was working and began to tape off a small crater in the road. The Germans sighted them and the two men hit the ground as a mortar barrage came in. A few seconds later they heard the chilling screams as the Germans opened up on them with "Screaming Meemies." It was the first time the men had ever heard this weapon, and the horrible scream was something they will never forget. They were still on the ground when they heard Cockney accents behind them. A British Patrol was working behind them up the road and the men crouched in a shell hole until the British caught up to them. The patrol leader told them that they were far out in "No-Man's-Land", and less than a hundred yards away from the Germans.

Corporal Peterson was trying to reach the two men in the meanwhile, and was caught in the same barrage. One mortar shell exploded at his side, as he was lying on the road. Peterson was numbed from the hips down, and layed there for several moments building up courage to feel the seat of his pants to see if he was bleeding. He thought that he had lost his legs.

At 1200 on the 21st, Col. Goodpaster ordered his adjutant, by phone from the field, to notify higher headquarters that, "The road was officially open for all classes of vehicles."

In six days, the 48th had accomplished a miracle in military engineering. Able Company had graded and cleared two miles of railroad into a military road, and reduced six major obstacles. The obstacles were (1) a stream forty feet wide and fifteen feet below grade, (2) a 118 foot overpass of steel and masonry, which had been dropped across the railbed, (3) a stream 32 feet wide thirty feet below grade,

(4) a crater twenty-six feet wide and eleven feet deep, (5) an underpass 32 feet wide and ten feet deep into which the right of way had been dropped, (6) bridging and building approaches at a stream 48 feet below grade where 275 feet of existing bridge had been destroyed. Enemy artillery fire was both heavy and accurate for Able Company received more than 170 rounds of shellfire in three days. On two occasions, the men of Able Company worked 36 hours continuously in spite of the most difficult weather conditions.

Baker Company was assigned, (7) a completely destroyed bridge with a gap of 350 feet and a grade 85 feet above water level. They prepared for class 40 traffic, two viaducts, (8) one 110 feet long with a depth of 40 feet below grade, (9) one, 120 feet long, with a depth of thirty feet below grade. Both viaducts were under direct enemy observation and artillery and automatic weapons fire. Baker Company cleared and graded one mile of roadway, the forward end of the mile being one hundred yards past friendly infantry outpost positions. The work on the viaducts was done under heavy hostile artillery fire at night, and the enemy would fire at the sound of the bulldozers working at the sites. The work in clearing the last hundred yards of the road past forward positions was accomplished in a minimum of time in the daylight under short range artillery fire, machine gun fire, and rifle fire. The earthwork tasks of Baker Company were accomplished under the added difficulty of exceptionally heavy rains. Baker Company worked unusually long hours on four consecutive days to accomplish all their assigned tasks in the time allotted.

Charlie Company was assigned the task of, (10) bridging a 103-foot gap with a grade 48 feet above water level. They cleared and graded two miles of railroad right of way, one mile of which was under direct enemy artillery fire. Charlie Company made passable, in one day, (11) a demolished stone arch culvert 69 feet wide at water level, and 60 feet below grade. The Charlie Company bridge site was high and exposed, and enemy artillery fire was almost continuous and accurate. During preparation of the near bank, more than forty rounds landed within fifty yards of the working party, and eight rounds within twenty yards. The bridge itself was built at night and more than 130 rounds were received on the site during the construction period. The next assignment of Charlie Company was (12) preparing a blown underpass for two way traffic. The gap was 120 feet wide and 20 feet deep. More than 200 rounds of enemy artillery fire landed in the areas of construction during the working period.

Still more Headaches



Fifth Army awarded the following commendation for the work of the men of the 48th on the Express Highway:

"The 48th Engineer Combat Battalion is commended for the outstanding devotion to duty and meritorious conduct, during the period 15 December to 21st December, 1943. This unit was assigned the mission of converting the railroad between Mignano and Cassino, Italy, into a two-way highway. The road contained twelve obstacles ranging from craters to destroyed bridges and constituted a high defile, open throughout to direct German observation and observed artillery fire, which was accurate, continuing and concentrated, on all work parties and equipment. Obstacle sites, not accessible by the road, were reached by routes opened and constructed through mine and trip-wire fields flanking the railroad. The road was constructed to a point two hundred yards in advance of infantry outposts under hostile small arms fire. On two occasions the officers and the men of the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion carried on their work continuously for 36 hours, with highest determination and spirit. Despite all the obstacles, the inclement weather, and intense artillery fire, they completed their hazardous mission as ordered. The performance of the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion was an inspiration to other units, and reflects the highest traditions of the Corps of Engineers."

Although the Highway was open for traffic, the 48th continued to maintain and improve the highway for the next three months. The heavy rains were continually washing out the by-passes, and the military traffic and constant shellfire continually scarred the road with craters and potholes.

Shortly after the completion of the highway, Able Company was assigned the repair of a crater on this side of the Baker Bailey bridge. The job required a lot of rocks. The men were sent with the trucks to an open field on the right side of the railroad to get them. There were piles of rock there, where evidently some Italians had been planning to build a house. The men had loaded three trucks when the Germans started to shell. There were some Signal Corps troops in the vicinity and they had holes dug in the banks of the railroad. It was in these holes that the men took cover. A British bivouac on the left in an open field was taking an awful blasting. The first shells landed in the British area, but the next ones started reaching for the Engineers at work on the road. It was natural for Pvt. Roland and Pvt. Piscatelli to stay together when the shells came in for they were inseparable buddies. One would never be seen without the other. They did everything together. When pup tents were pitched, they would form one tent with their halves. When passes were given, it was automatic at Able Company to give Roland a pass when Piscatelli received one. At night, they would get in the same card games together or just wander around. When everyone else scattered, the two friends ran side by side for the comparative safety of the other side of the railroad embankment. They reached the highway embankment safely, and for a moment, they watched the shells break around the trucks and buildings several hundred yards away. They started to run down to the CP, where they would find out if they were supposed to go back to camp or not. They figured they were safe now, for the shelling was more than a mile away. They were almost within calling distance of the CP when there was a shrill whistle; both men started to hit the ground. They were caught in a half crouched position, when the shell hit not more than a foot in back of the two men. The concussion and shrapnel blew Roland's leg off at the hip and filled Piscatelli's back and abdomen with bits of shrapnel. Military Police at the entrance of the road hailed a passing ambulance and the two men were quickly hustled onto stretchers. Roland stayed conscious all the way to the hospital and kept telling Piscatelli that he would be all right. Roland and Piscatelli reached the hospital and Roland was immediately placed on the emergency operating table. His last words were, "I didn't wait twenty years for this." By morning, word came that Piscatelli had died, also. They were buddies to the end. The same shell killed them both.



A Big Blow

Highway 48 was a tough job for the Medics, too. During one of the hottest barrages on the highway, the Starlight phone rang in the Battalion Aid Station, and a nervous voice at the other end told Capt. Snider that two men had been hit by shell fire on one of the forward jobs. Capt. Snider and Cpl. Mac Dowel dashed outside, climbed into a jeep and sped down the highway amid bursting shells. The Germans saw the jeep and attempted to hit the speeding vehicle as it bounced down the road. At least eight shells burst within forty yards of the jeep, and fragments from one of the shells wounded Capt. Snider. Despite his wounds he continued down the road and reached the spot where the men were lying. By the time the ambulance arrived, first aid had been administered, and the wounded men were quickly placed inside. As the vehicle drove away four shells burst within ten yards of it, and although the ambulance was hit, no one inside of it was injured. Because of the unselfish action on the part of the Medics, the lives of the two wounded men were saved. Capt. Snider and Cpl. MacDowell each received the Silver Star for this action.

The Medics had done a splendid job during the construction of the highway. There was a medic with each platoon on all of the work sites, and the Battalion Aid Station was often divided into two forward aid stations, dispersed along the road between the work sites. The Medics treated all wounded. British Infantry and American Engineers were often lying side by side awaiting the impartial aid of the Medics.

One afternoon a sudden barrage opened up on the Headquarters Company and the Battalion CP. The men were working on the trucks in the motor pool, and the offices set up in the buildings were crowded with men working out the plans for the Highway. After the first two or three shells burst, men began to scramble for cover. Sergeant Scavone from the motor pool ran towards the street holding his arm and calling for the Medics. Sergeant Russell of the Medics grabbed his first aid kit and ran for the area, although the shells were still coming in. Near the corner of the motor pool Sgt. Tisovich and Corporal Kantz had been working on a jeep. A shell fell behind them and killed them both instantly. Sergeant Russell dropped to his knees and hastily examined the two men. There was nothing he could do. Across the motor pool a soldier propped up against a tree was bleeding badly and moaning. Sergeant Russell dashed across the open space and gave the man a shot of morphine. Then he ripped away the man's clothing and applied sulfa and a dressing. Russell noticed one of Able Company's men lying on the ground near a truck, watching him patiently, waiting his turn. Sergeant Russell next moved to him and gave him morphine and was preparing a dressing for the man's wound when the shelling began again. Russell pulled him into a nearby hole and began ripping the man's trousers to get a dressing on his leg. His leg was broken, but no splint was available. The only flat surface the sergeant could find was a nearby weapons carrier. The Sergeant called for help, and lifted the man into the truck. The other wounded were gathered into the truck, and during a lull in the firing, they were rushed to the hospital.

The Four section was flooded with calls and requests as the work progressed, and the supply trucks dashed madly down the roads in a race against time to cut red tape and get supplies without holding up the work. The supplies had to be there in the right amount, or a whole company of almost one hundred and twenty-five men would have to stand around idly and exposed to enemy shell fire until the red tape could be untangled and the right supplies in the right amount could be brought forward.

The Four office was humming with details as drivers and noncoms reported in and rushed out with their assignments. There were a hundred details a day -- and each one vitally important to some group of wet engineers who were fighting in the mud up the road against a stubborn bridge or by-pass. It was a big problem of co-ordination with which they were faced. They had to get the right amount of material at the right location at the right time.

"Company Baker will require another 1,000 pounds of dynamite. Send it back with the driver who carries the message. Also 1040 linear feet of 2x12 lumber will be required and request you have it in the dump by 1800, 18 December. Several kegs of nails will also be required. Lumber and nails will be used for treadway on Bailey." This was a typical message that came to Four on the 17th. On its heels came another, "Will require 100 gallons of diesel oil, 100 gallons of gasoline, also spare plates for treads on D-7. Send Mr. Swift or Sergeant Blankenship with heavy equipment repairman and maintenance vehicle."

Four dispatched ten men on ten different errands and had the material at the time it was needed. This meant long trips to the dumps around Naples and the time consuming impatience of processing requisitions or by-passing the red tape, and getting the materials loaded. The officers and men of Four did a wonderful job of supply.

The communications section, too, had survived their first real test. Originally, the communications section had been recruited from members of field artillery communications and during the first three months overseas, had done odd jobs around the battalion. There hadn't been too much work along telephone or radio lines, and the men were required only to string lines from the Letter Companies to Headquarters if they planned to be in a bivouac for several days.

Along Highway 48, the communications section came into its own, and the Battalion suddenly realized how important the telephone lines were. Every Company and Section was given a code name, and the lines were laid quickly soon after the assignment of the highway was given. Telephones were placed at each major obstacle, as it was discovered by the recon, so that communication would be almost instantaneous to the Battalion. As the barrages opened up on the road, the vulnerable telephone line was constantly being cut, and repair crews walked the lines almost constantly. As fast as a line went out, the crew would be dispatched, and would begin walking at the CP end of the road and following the line through the fields and along the embankments past the working parties along the five mile route. It was almost a daily five mile hike for the men, and often they had to walk the route two or three times a day. It wasn't an ordinary five mile hike, for the bursting shells and the deep mud made the five miles a torture.



Anybody got a aspirin ?

The Communications Section began work on the highway as a green group of men without any experience and went into the toughest assignment possible for a telephone network. Passing tanks chewed up their wire, and constant shellfire cut it. The rain and mud buried the breaks and the men had to grovel in the fields on their hands and knees to find it. Flash floods buried the wire under water, and the men had to wade up to their knees through the icy water to follow the line. They went out on repair parties at all hours of the night and day and managed to keep the phones open the entire time that the highway was being built. When the harrowing six days of building was completed, the 48th Engineer communications section was a wise, smooth working team who had met and conquered every obstacle possible.

Colonel Goodpaster was tired but proud and happy when the highway was completed. He had taken a green engineer outfit into an engineer task that required the utmost skill on just about every type of obstacle in military engineer training. He sent the following Christmas commendation to the officers and men who had completed the tough assignment of Highway 48:

"During the six days which ended at noon December 21, 1943, this Battalion completed the mission of opening up for two-way passage of Class 40 traffic, a five mile stretch of railroad containing twelve major obstacles, all under observed enemy artillery fire from German "Winter Line" prepared positions, the forward end being under automatic weapons fire. On being assigned the task, I realized that it could be accomplished in the allotted time only with the fullest all-out effort of the Battalion. It was a job which could be done, although it would be as hard an engineer test as any we will ever encounter.

The job was done in time. It was done because every man threw all his strength, determination, and courage into the task, because every officer put all of his skill, leadership, and valor into it, and because the Battalion drove through to success as a hard-working, courageous team.

You know what I think of your work. I have told you on every job what splendid work you were doing. Other Commanders have given their warmest congratulations on your accomplishments.

I have served in and with some of the finest units of the army. You men who constitute this battalion can take your place among them. Your performance of the last six days, though many of you do not realize it yet, matches the proudest accomplishments of the Corps of Engineers through its brilliant century and a half history.

Under artillery fire, I always think, these are the times that try men's souls. It is said, "Some people have got it and some people ain't. You men have got it."

I am proud to share with you the privilege of serving in this Battalion."

88 FEVER

Suddenly, it seemed, it was Christmas. Somehow, Christmas just wasn't expected. The flurry of work and incessant shelling of the past week on Highway 48 -- and the aftermath of strange, uncanny stories made the men realize how lucky they were and what a big thing they had done. Christmas was dull, for the reaction was setting in. The past week had been at a feverish pace and it seemed to everyone that it was a confused memory of rain and mud and sleepless nights and the ear-splitting scream of incoming shells.

Most of us can't recall that first Christmas overseas very well. The night before, American artillery had given Mount Porchia a thorough plastering, and the ground had rocked with the thunder of the guns. The dawn broke clear, but a storm began to appear before noon, and during dinner it reached almost hurricane strength. The men ran with their soggy turkey to their pup tents and had Christmas dinner in the cold dampness of their tents. The wind ripped at the tents and found loose pegs in the muddy ground. Soon, the tents were ripping and the blankets were soaked as the water poured through the holes. Some of the tents went down, and the men crawled out into the wind and rain to find new spots for the pegs and fight the tents up again.

Late in the afternoon, the rain turned into a light snow. The tired, worn men finally had their white Christmas, but the earlier rain formed icy puddles in the fields, and as night approached, the cold became intense.

Orders came from Headquarters that work during the day should be as light as possible, so only a few men had to go out in the chilling rain on the sloppy roads, but Charlie Company was assigned a secret mission during the day. The night before Lt. Reardon had asked for some volunteers to go on a secret mission. Sgt. Williams, PFC Updegraff, T/5 Nedrick, PFC Jacubac, PFC Duffy, Pvt. Durko, Pvt. Cowan, T/5 Lipay, and Cpl. Burns volunteered. They were given a brief outline of their job and at five o'clock the next morning they started out. The men were a little downhearted; what a way to spend Christmas! But the lieutenant promised them that there would be plenty of turkey for them as soon as the work was completed. They climbed a trail leading to the top of Mt. Lungo and worked on the rock, preparing a dugout for an observation post. Although they were in plain sight of the jerries, the day passed without mishap. It was late in the afternoon when they returned to their bivouac area. The cooks had a hot turkey dinner waiting for them. It was then that the reason for all the secrecy of their mission was disclosed. General Clark, Commanding General of the Fifth Army, and his staff were going to use it as an observation post.

The situation report to 1108th Group at the end of the dull Christmas read, "Foxholes completed as assigned. Assigned roads maintained. Number of shells comparatively low."

A lone 170mm shell sailed into the Charlie Company Bailey Bridge on Highway 48 and slightly damaged it. It was repaired in fifteen minutes and again opened for traffic.

On the 27th, the 48th was requested to examine all Italian civilians around the company areas and make a thorough search of all Italians passing through the front and moving down Highway 48. Intelligence had heard a rumor that Italian spies in the vicinity of Mignano were sending information to the Germans by a concealed radio.

Bailey On Highway 48



Culvert On Highway 48



Send Up The Dozer



The Engineers hadn't bothered much with the Italians from Mignano. They were constantly coming down to Highway Six and the junction with the Express Highway at the CP. They watched amazed as the long lines of military vehicles passed up Cassino valley. Everything going or coming from the front passed the CP at Mignano, for there were only two roads leading to the town of Cassino. Originally only Highway Six led to the town, but now the new Highway 48 led up to Mt. Porchia and there was a lateral road, Knox Avenue, that led traffic back to Six. Knox Avenue was plenty hot, for the Germans were thoroughly entrenched on Porchia, and the Infantry had moved to the far slopes of Lungo, so Knox Avenue was used only at night by tanks and light cars—and even then it wasn't used very often by them.

But the Italians would stand fascinated at the apparent variety of English and American vehicles that moved up and back. The men of the 48th began to wonder if the civilians couldn't also count the vehicles and report fairly accurately long in advance when an attack was scheduled. It would take only a small amount of guesswork to estimate the number of casualties coming back, by counting the ambulances that had to pass the CP. Replacements, too, could be counted as the trucks rolled up. All of the units fighting had their numbers on their vehicle bumpers and an observer standing on the corner could get the complete battle order of the Allies as the vehicles swung around the corner.

After the spy story, the 48th learned to watch the civilians more closely, and some of the men chased the Italians away.

Some time later, the 48th learned that two Italians had been captured with a complex German transmitter high in a house on a mountain to the right of Mignano. The men wondered if this was the reason why the shell fire had been so accurate on Highway 48, and if this might not be the explanation of how the Germans seemed to anticipate every move that the 48th made in the construction of the road.

For a while, it made the 48th spy conscious, and the men were unusually careful for a while not to disclose any information that was restricted and a lot that wasn't restricted. For a few days, the Italians in Mignano didn't have the slightest idea of how the war was going.

The 48th continued to work along Highway 48, amid occasional bursts of artillery that pocked the road with craters. The road became a combination race course and proving ground for British vehicles, which would stall in the middle and hold up entire convoys. The British didn't mind stalling, for they were loathe to hurry, even in the worst shell fire. They would pull up at tea time and the entire convoy would block the road and the bridges while the British would come to the side of the road with their small stoves, and gather around for tea.

The British tea was good and it had a way of warming us through the bitter cold days that could not be accomplished by our excellent coffee. Often the British would invite the engineers standing by their fires, for tea, and the men of the 48th would trade their Raleigh cigarettes for a canteen cup of tea.

Tea was a custom in the British army that was as strict as reveille in the American army. No attack would ever be launched at tea time, and no matter how severe the shelling and no matter how close the shells came the British would drink their tea unperturbed.



We admired the British foolhardy bravery, however. On one culvert a Britisher stood up on the road amid a barrage and laughed at the engineers crouching in the hole below. The next few seconds, a shell came in and he completely disappeared.

The British Infantry fought without their little steel helmets, and would often go into the assault bareheaded. The Germans often did the same thing. We could never understand this, for an American soldier caught in an artillery barrage, was really worried if he didn't have the psychological protection of his steel helmet.

The British were magnificent. On the way to a Medical Forward Station, some of the 48th Medics saw a British column of men moving up Highway 48. A barrage landed among them, and the first shells hit right in the center of the group before they could get to the ground. It blew them more than ten feet in the air, and there were clouds of black smoke in several wide slashes in the column. No sooner had the barrage ceased, than the British moved back into file and continued as unperturbed as though nothing happened. The British medics moved in to take care of the wounded, and the rest of the column continued down the road. The dead remained on the shoulders of the road for days until the British had time to collect them.

Another time, Sergeant Russell and Corporal Jolly of the 48th Medics was requested to come to the aid of a British battery less than a hundred yards from the CP. A German large caliber shell had scored a direct hit on the gun position, and the British gun crew had suffered severe casualties. Russell and Jolly assisted in giving the men first aid, then called an ambulance to evacuate them. No sooner had the men been evacuated, than the remaining members of the British crew had a fire going and the water already boiling for some tea to help their nerves.

Many times the artillery came close to the CP, and the Headquarters men would lie awake at night and listen to the big shells whine over their heads and break down the road, or among the British gun positions that surrounded the CP buildings.

After the shelling that the motor pool took, the mechanics were touchy about making too much noise hammering the vehicles back into shape. They couldn't hear the shells come in. Mr. Swift said that he thought that the shelling had been caused by the flame of the arc welder. German observers, seeing the flame from a distance, might easily confuse it with the muzzle blast of an artillery piece. There was really no reason why the motor pool should remain in a position where harassing fire was continually falling, so the motor pool was moved seven miles down Highway Six, so that the expensive heavy equipment, gas and oil stores would be safe, and the essential work could be accomplished without the danger of artillery fire.

The Germans would pick crossroads for interdictory artillery targets and the junction of Highway Six and Highway 48 at Mignano was getting popular with them. Fortunately, their aim was a trifle wide, and most of the shells sped harmlessly over the CP and landed on the far side of the road. Apparently, they intended to correct their errors, for one day they walked a barrage down the highway and made the turn in to Highway Six. The next shell hit in a small barn, close to the S-2, S-3 office, the next blew the officers' mess tent high in the trees; the third buried Cpl. Smith and PFC Van Pembrouck and two British soldiers in the kitchen. The next shell landed in a small building occupied by PFC Quern and PFC Johnson. It was a delayed action shell which went through the wall and knocked a door flat splattering the room with shrapnel. Another shell followed which killed a major from the Military Police standing at the junction of the crossroads.

The shell that landed in the kitchen, powdered the rear wall and left four men buried under the rubble. Men ran from all directions and gathered about the room. A line was formed and the men pulled the rocks away. Strangely enough, none of the men from the 48th were wounded. They were bruised and cut and shocked, but none of them were hit by shrapnel. The two British had fared worse. One of them was badly cut and the other was unconscious with probable internal injuries. Cpl. Hall had been standing near the door behind a truck when the shell hit the kitchen, and he was badly shocked from the concussion as the wall caved in beside him. For more than an hour he was in a dazed condition, and was semi-conscious for more than a half hour.

PFC Quern had just brought back his messkit from chow, and hung it in the room where Johnson was lying. Quern moved from the room, and a few seconds later the shell hit. His messgear was pierced by twelve pieces of shrapnel. Johnson's bed was close to the floor, and most of the big shrapnel rang off the walls about him. One small piece of it caught him in the back and he staggered out of the room dizzy with the shock of the concussion and the realization that he was bleeding. The driver of a passing ambulance saw him on the road and noticed the blood. He stopped and hustled Johnson into the back of the ambulance.

After the barrage, the company recovered and began to look at their losses. A crowd gathered around Johnson's room and asked Quern if he was safe. Quern said that Johnson had been inside when he left. No one had seen him since. The Johnson mystery deepened, when he didn't return to pick up his bedroll and move it to a safer place as the other men had done. The first sergeant ordered a search of the area, and the men really worried when Johnson didn't show up for evening chow. The next morning, he was missing at reveille, so the first sergeant was perplexed. What would he be on the morning report -- AWOL or MIA? Was Johnson frightened by the shellfire and "over the hill" or had he run somewhere for a hole and been killed in the company area? The men fanned out and tried to find his body around the company area, but he could not be found. The first sergeant decided that Johnson must have run away, so he entered in his records that way for almost a week, when the hospital notified the 48th that Johnson had come in as an emergency patient.



They Found 39 mines



Number 40!



Number 41!



Under Way

The 48th had a few casualties. There were always one or two wounded by shrapnel or someone hurt by a truck every week. The winter dragged on and the weather grew colder. By New Years it was snowing, and the men were doing their road patrol bundled in heavy clothing. Not many of us took off our clothes to sleep at night. We would quickly throw off our wet shoes and socks, pull off our coats, and slide quickly into our bedrolls. We would wear the same clothes for weeks. Sgt. Specker of Charlie Company would frequently say, "How I would like to take off my clothes and go to bed." Changing was a problem which had to be faced bravely every so often. We would have to decide that it was about time to put on a clean pair of ODs, and then build up our nerve for two or three days. Then, we would lay out each article of our clean clothing in some comparatively warm spot, and plan a quick change as carefully as some major campaign.

The Cassino Valley campaign was the highlight of the American papers during the winter. The Americans were making slow but steady progress against the German winter line, the articles said, but Montecassino would be the strongpoint. The valley was a military route from Rome to Naples, and Hannibal had crossed through the same mountains where the Americans were now fighting. But the newspapers had no idea of the slow agonizing personal war that the Infantry, Tankers, and Engineers were fighting against the cold, the snow, the rains, and the Germans.

On New Years Day, the Germans still held Mt. Porchia, Mt. Trocchio and the town of Cassino. The Americans had not moved more than five miles during the entire month.

There was entirely too much tension in the valley. The men of the 48th had an idea that something would be brewing. They hadn't long to wait.

On the night of the 3rd of January, the company phones were ringing. A meeting was scheduled by the colonel at the CP in Mignano for 1800 that evening.

A tank attack was scheduled during the evening of the 4th and 5th of January to carry Mt. Porchia and reach the Rapido River. An artillery barrage was scheduled to blast the Germans from their strongpoints. Then the tanks would race up Highway 48 and the parallel Highway 6 and attack Mt. Porchia with the Sixth Armored Infantry and the other elements of Task Force Allen. The mission of the 48th was to open the way for the tanks and the tank destroyers so that they could move far up Highway 48 and find firing positions off the road near Mt. Porchia. Baker Company was to prepare Obstacle 13 on Highway 48 for tank traffic, pass the tanks, and then be prepared to defend the position as Infantry. This meant that Baker Company would go to the far end of the Highway and prepare a bypass within hand grenade range of the Germans. Charlie and Able Companies were to assist elements of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion and artillery units to new positions by sweeping the minefields and building trails from Highway 48 to the firing positions.

On the night of the fourth, everything was ready, and there was a tenseness in the air as tankers sat alerted on their tanks and waited nervously for H-Hour, which was at 1930. As dark set in Colonel Goodpaster and Capt. Van Campen with Sgt. Attleson, a radio operator, started down Highway 48 to establish an advance command post at the base of Mt. Lungo. To expedite messages between the Colonel and the Companies, radio communication was to be used. As the radio went on the air the Germans locators were kept busy tracking it down. They soon had the half track pin-pointed, for a heavy barrage fell dangerously close. But radio communication was a must. Sgt. Attleson despite the knowledge that everytime he'd send a message it would bring down a German barrage, continued sending. There was no time to be lost; the lives of too many men were at stake. To add to this, small arms fire started to crackle off the sides of the half track. One 30 caliber bullet hit Sgt. Attleson's helmet and dented it. But there was only one thing to do and that was to sweat it out.

Shortly before H-Hour, the British artillery opened up, and for a long while, Mt. Porchia burned in an almost steady glow as the phosphorous and HE shells exploded over the entire face of the mountain. Then the tanks and the tanks destroyers began to move slowly up Highway 48.

On the lower end of the road all was noise and confusion, as the task force began moving. A column of tanks roared around the corner of Highway 48 and made the night vibrate with the noise of their motors. Nearby, the British gunners threw shell after shell into their hot guns to conceal the noise of the tanks as they raced up the five-mile stretch of the Highway.

But on the other end of the Highway, the men of Baker Company slipped silently towards Obstacle 13. They heard the roar of the sudden action behind them and saw the confused flashes as the hundreds of guns opened up. To the right of them came the crunch of the shells as Mt. Porchia lit up under the impact of the fire.

Baker Company had loaded the culvert into their trucks and started up the road at seven o'clock. A half-track, bristling with machine guns, led the cumbersome convoy up the Highway. By eight o'clock, they were approaching their objective. The night was perfect, for there was no moon. The night was so black, that the drivers felt the road rather than saw it. The trucks flinched at each small dip, and the drivers hung far out of the cab to guide the big trucks through the dips that led to three bridge sites of Highway 48. About a hundred yards from Site 13, the trucks stopped and the men dropped from them silently. The officers and noncoms held a brief whispered conversation, and then started for the site. They were only gone for ten minutes, but to the men, trying to see through the inky blackness of the night, it seemed like hours. The noncoms told the men, that the Germans were probably less than a hundred yards from the site, and that the back breaking job of earth moving for the culvert would have to be done noiselessly or every mortar this side of Cassino would be down on them. Riflemen were selected, and moved out on all sides of the culvert. Most of the noises from the picks and shovels were drowned out by the continuous rumble of tanks and artillery from the rear, and the Germans seemed well occupied under the barrage that was covering Mt. Porchia. There was no opposition from the enemy on the site yet.

It was nearly midnight when the trucks were eased back, and the men began to lift off the prefabricated culvert pieces and place them in the prepared site. There was a lot of noise now. After a man scraped a shovel or a culvert part was accidentally dropped, the men would freeze and wait a minute before beginning again. The intense quiet and the darkness and the lack of movement on the side of the enemy began to wear on the men's nerves. The slightest noise would make them start and then freeze. Their nerves were so tense that there were more mistakes than usual. The men were too quick and the parts would slip or jam.

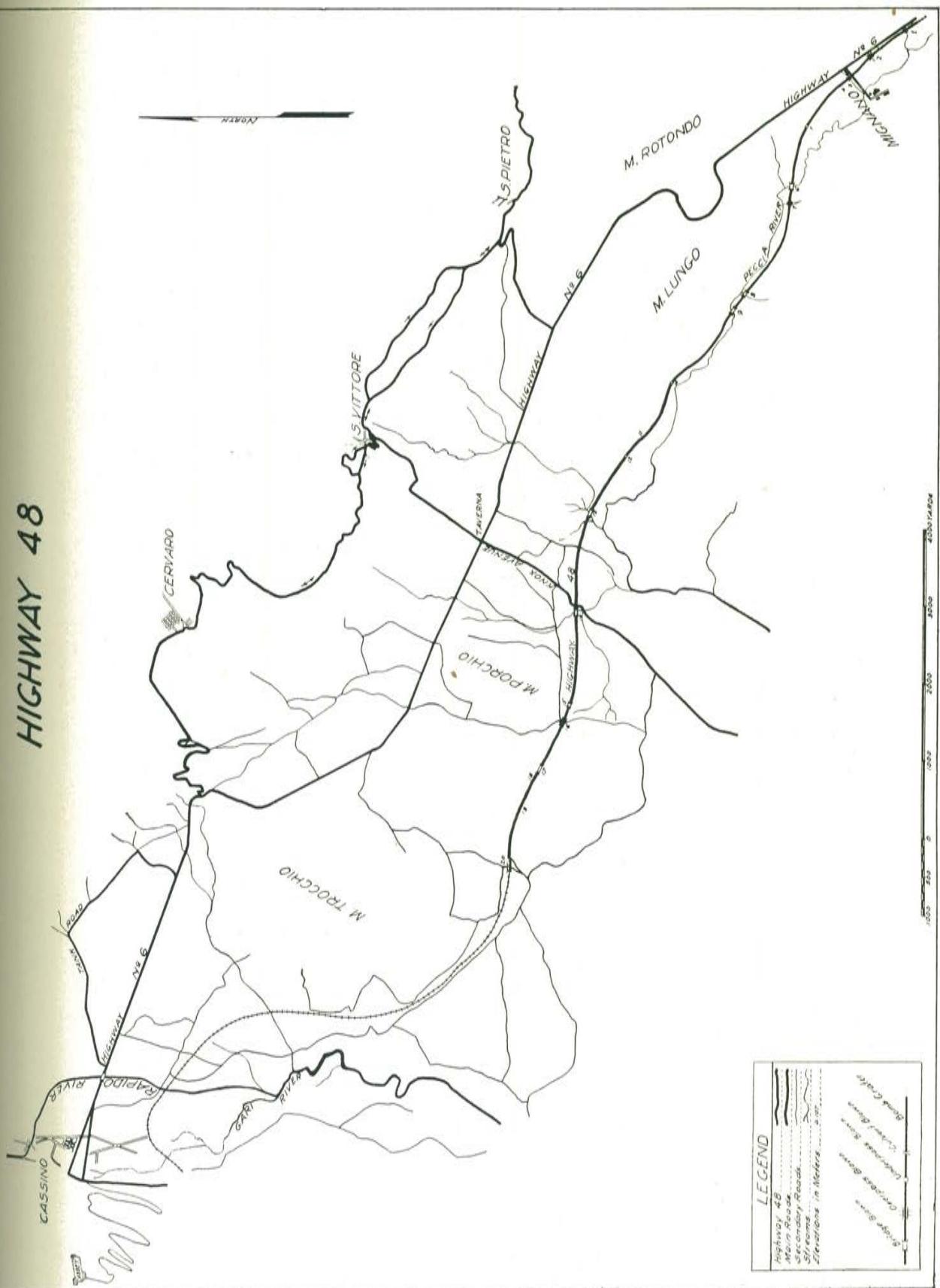
Meanwhile, the roar of the tanks was getting louder behind them. By now the Infantry had jumped off to the right. Things looked as though they were going well. Once the hill was reached, and the Infantry began to make progress, the tanks would begin to cross Site 13, trying to find firing positions to lend support on the far side of Mt. Porchia as the Infantry chased the Germans from the top of the mountains and down the other side. Lt. Haley wondered if the site would be finished in time, and wondered why the tanks were not moving to find new firing positions. It shouldn't take the Infantry long if everything went well.

There wasn't enough Infantry in Task Force Allen. The 6th Armored Infantry fought bravely and managed to move partially up the mountainside, before it looked as they would have the strength to take the rest of the hill. The fire from the artillery was accurate and the Tankers made the Germans keep their heads down, but it was tough going up in the mud on the mountainside. The Infantry were giving the Germans all they had, and the tired men were dashing over the open spaces up the hill into strong automatic weapons and machine gun fire.

At 0430 in the morning, Capt. Van Campen and his driver, Pvt. Boyd, came back to S-3 dog-tired. Both looked beat; the attack had failed miserably. Capt. Van Campen woke up Pvt. Woodcox and told him, "I'm going to send you forward. Have all our men pulled back to their bivouacs immediately. Tell the dozer operators to lose no time for if they do not return by daylight the Germans will have a direct bead on them. Likewise notify the medics who are half way up on Highway 48 with Pvt. Flory and his weapons carrier and an ambulance. The half track which we used as the forward command post is near the tip of Mt. Lungo, that too, is to pull back."

Woodcox, although outside was total blackness, had no trouble keeping on the road for the continuous gun flashes lighted his way. The incoming shells however unnerved him. Woodcox said, "I'm not ashamed to say I was scared." But he kept his head low and drove at a race track speed down Highway 48.

HIGHWAY 48



Down on Site 13, Baker Company worked through the darkness. The culvert was fast nearing completion. If the tanks came now they could pass over. But the tanks were busy elsewhere. They were not having things their own way. Suddenly, from down the road, a vehicle was heard approaching, it came to a stop and then there was an uncertain scraping of feet. The men froze in their tracks; the site was instantly silent. The men strained to listen above the rumble of guns and the faint crack of the exploding shells on nearby Mt. Porchia. A form materialized out of the darkness; it was Woodcox. He called quietly for Lt. Haley, and said, "Bring the men in." Lt. Haley shrugged his shoulders, and the men began to file silently down the road. They had a strange premonition that things were not going well on Mt. Porchia. There were too few tanks in the forward areas.

Woodcox, having notified everyone, was getting ready to return when he was halted by three soldiers who had been forward on reconnaissance. They told him about midnight they had passed a soldier laying to the left of Highway 48 in an open field. They tried to get the First Aid Station near there to help him, but the Medics were too busy. Woodcox had one of the men get into his jeep and guide him to the spot. They could hear the agonizing sound of a man begging for help. They jumped out of the jeep, cut across the field and guided by the soldier's moaning, hurried to him. Woodcox quickly asked the wounded man what had happened. The soldier had his leg run over by a tank destroyer and in addition a piece of shrapnel had hit him. Woodcox asked him if he was bleeding. The soldier replied that he thought he felt a trickle of blood, but that was a while back. Woodcox didn't dare light up a match to see where he was bleeding. But he quickly had the other man unload the soldier's rifle, lay it on the soldier's left side and then used the entrenching spade as the inside splint for the man's broken leg. To make certain that the fracture would not develop into something more serious, they took the soldier's blanket and ripped it into strips and tied his legs together. Sanders was the wounded soldier's name, and he was from the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Armored Infantry, that was attacking Mt. Porchia that night. He was in a pitiful state for he had laid shivering in the mud for almost five hours pleading for help. He kept a tight grip on Woodcox's arm and kept saying over and over, "If you hadn't come along, I'd still be laying here." Sanders was one of the many that had been wounded in the assault that night.

Things were not going well on Porchia. It was nearly 0500 on the morning of the 5th of January, and each Company Commander of the 48th was holding a small scrap of paper, on which had been scrawled hastily in ink... "Withdraw at once to vicinity Battalion Headquarters and prepare for Infantry combat. Company Commanders report to me at once at Battalion Headquarters..." Signed, Colonel Goodpaster.



MT. PORCHIA

The rumor flew with the wind that the 48th was going in as Infantry, as the men moved back down Highway 48. The night was bitter cold; and the men had the strange feeling all through the night that the attack was not going well. They had no official information, but everyone knew somehow.

Able Company continued to struggle with a tank destroyer and two bulldozers, that had become mired in a stream bed and were holding up a line of TDs on the highway.

The Infantry continued to fight through the morning, and at 1335, the 48th notified the 1108th Group that all work would be discontinued on Highway 48 so that the companies could comply with the infantry combat order. Highway 48 would not hold up long without engineer maintenance, and the tanks and tank destroyers could not maneuver through the forward areas without the assistance of engineers to clear the mines and help the big vehicles over the tough spots.

At a meeting at 1415, Colonel Goodpaster explained that the 48th would constitute the Task Force Allen Reserve. The Infantry losses had been severe, and there was a large gap in the Infantry lines. If the Germans counter-attacked, they would have a clear path through the lines in this weak spot. The 48th would probably be called upon to fill this gap. The companies were to assemble in a forward area near Mt. Porchia and await the call of the Task Force Commander.

The tempo was increased during the afternoon, as the men prepared their machine guns, and loaded up with hand grenades, bandoliers of ammunition and mines.

At 1600, the 1108th Group Field Order 1 was published, "The enemy holds a general line known as the "B" phase line. The Sixth Armored Infantry is attacking in the Task Force Allen zone of action. The 91st Reconnaissance Troop has been directed to take over from the British the hill in the vicinity of 923144 (between Staz di Rocca d'Evandro and the northern tip of Mt. Maggiore). You will occupy the high ground in the vicinity of 930138 (Mt. Maggiore) as Task Force Reserve, being prepared to occupy a sector to the west or northwest. You will move by march along Highway 48 and British road to occupy positions."

The companies moved slowly down the five-mile stretch of road leading to the forward areas near Mt. Porchia. The night was cold, but the pace of the march and the pace at which events had tumbled headlong on top of the men throughout the past two nights kept them thinking and walking, and they hardly noticed the chill of the night air. The three companies reached their area, which was to the left of Highway 48 near the northern edge of Mt. Maggiore, and fanned out to occupy their assigned ground. The men dug in and set up their machine guns and prepared for the expected German counter-attack. It grew dark fast on the hill, and with the darkness came the bitter cold of the January night. The men lay in their damp holes tense with excitement and stared out into the gloom. Patrols were sent out to contact all three companies of the 48th and the Sixth Armored Infantry and the 91st Recon on the flanks.

The colonel and his small staff had located a forward CP in a chicken coop in the valley below Porchia. It had a horrible smell, but at least a candle could be kept burning and the flimsy walls were enough to stop the driving wind that raced across the valley. They weren't enough, however, to stop the shrapnel from the bursting shells that were continually raking the valley, and towards morning, the colonel elected to move his staff into the shelter of a near-by defile.



Mt. Porchia

Meanwhile the men on the hill were settling down to wait for the Germans. The original tenseness began to wear off and the men were getting over their first feverish excitement. They became more conscious of the cold and they were getting tired and sleepy. It was hard to stay awake and wait. Many of the men almost fell asleep in the holes and the burst of shells would shake them awake with a start. The men were getting miserable and shivered throughout the early hours of the dawn. They were tired and getting hungry, but they were immensely relieved that the German attack did not come off. They were beginning to feel more sure that it would not come now. It had just been a bad night and they began to have the feeling that they would soon be back in their pup tents. This night would just be chalked up as a bad deal.

At 0930 in the morning of the 6th of January, this message came over the air from Task Force Allen's Headquarters: "Your Battalion is relieved of present assignment as Infantry. Move out your companies at once. Notify us when move is completed." Colonel Goodpaster, tired and worn from the night of waiting, ordered the companies back, and ordered a recon of Highway 48 to estimate the amount of work necessary to repair the damages done during the 24 hours that the 48th had been away from the road. A recon of sites 13 and 14 was ordered, so that the Battalion could complete these troublesome spots.

Details began to work the highway during the morning and as noon passed, the men were working their way up the road towards the two sites at the far end.

The men were glad to be back at their own work again. They could watch the shells falling in the forward area with a bit of personal interest now. They knew what the Infantry was doing there, for they had been a part of it all last night. The Infantry must be taking a terrible beating up on the mountain. The men wondered if they would be called up again that night to hold again. Holding wasn't bad. It was just uncomfortable. Many of the men decided to take blankets along and make themselves warm during the wait if they went up again. But then a lot of the men thought that new Infantry would be brought in. That was only a one-night stand last night. There were plenty of Infantry around. They would have more men up on the mountains by tonight. A lot of the men laughed at the blanket plan. They were prepared to spend the night in their pup tents.

At 1330 on the Sixth, the order came that a lot of the men were expecting. "Be prepared to move out as Infantry on a half hour's notice. One platoon from each company to be prepared to work on Obstacle 13."

Able Company was the last company to return from their Infantry mission of the previous night so it was just about the time that they got back that they were again called out. The men were given thirty minutes to get ready. Messkits were left dirty. The men hurried; it was a horrible feeling to know that you had to go straight back.

While preparing to move out, Lieutenant Hollar gathered the third platoon of Able Company around him to orient them on the mission facing them that night. The men, wearing packs, bandoliers, and rifles, were standing around him in a large group. Just about the time he had finished speaking to the men, a shell landed about 15 feet from the group. The ground was soft and for this the men were thankful, for the shell had penetrated to a good depth before it exploded. Nobody was hurt, but this was just a prelude. Just about then Sergeant Knipple, who had been cleaning his rifle, shot himself. The shot seemed to touch off a spark, for while first aid was being rendered him, several 170mm shells came screaming into Able Company's area. Sergeant Nyback and Pfc. Steinberg were fatally wounded by large fragments from the same shell. Under these conditions the men moved out in single file with every muscle tense.

The men had a hollow feeling. Not one spoke a word. They would sooner get back to their Infantry positions for at least then they would be somewhat sheltered in their holes.

Obstacle 13 remained the thorn in the side of the 48th, and plans were changed to permit two companies to move out to assist the Infantry and Baker Company to complete the work on the culvert.

Able and Charlie Companies moved out along Highway 48, to occupy approximately the same positions that they held the previous night. The Company Commanders were to report to the forward CP which was a shellwrecked building to the left of the forward tip of Highway 48. It was then that Able Company learned that they were attached to the 3rd Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, commanded

by Major Linville. Charlie Company was attached to the 1st Battalion. 6th Armored Infantry commanded by Colonel Definbraugh, for the mission of consolidating Mt. Porchia. Colonel Goodpaster, after assigning the two companies their mission, asked gravely, "Any questions?". Then he wished the officers, "Goodluck."

Mt. Porchia was not a big mountain. It was only 931 feet high. It crossed the Cassino Valley from Highway Six on the one side to Highway 48 on the other. Its sides were steep and rocky, and the summit was a sharp line that ran the entire length of the mountain. There were large stretches of flat reddish-brown shale in between small clumps of dark green bushes that managed somehow to hang tenaciously to the sides of the steep mountain. Mt. Porchia lay axially across the valley and that factor made it strategically valuable. Its approaches covered Highway Six to the right and Highway 48 to the left, and the summit offered a clear view of the valley as far to the rear as Mignano, five miles away. The steep forward slope of the mountain made it an almost impregnable defensive position, and the Germans had little to add to make it a fortress.

There were only a few places along the forward slope where an attacking force could move up the mountainside, and these spots were adequately covered with machine gun crossfire, from the guns of the crack Hermann Goering Division. In all, Mt. Porchia would be a very difficult mountain to take, and the Infantry was finding this fact out through the bitter experience of the first two nights of the Task Force Allen Attack.

The Germans intended to delay along Mt. Porchia and hold until their final defenses could be made for holding Mt. Cairo and the Rapido River Valley a mile to the north of the mountain. But if the mountain held the Germans were not in a hurry to give it up. Mt. Porchia, itself, would be a difficult problem to overcome, and the Germans would hold this excellent position as long as possible.

The open fields leading to the sudden, steep, slope of the mountain had been an excellent target for the enemy artillery, and the attacking forces were being constantly hammered across the flat-lands leading to the hill. The Infantry had to cross the fields in order to reach the mountain and there had been many casualties before Mt. Porchia had been gained. The fields had been extensively mined, and the supporting armor had to hack and clear a path everytime they changed firing positions.

But the Infantry had crossed the fields and had driven the Germans from their first positions at the foot of the hill. The Sixth Armored Infantry Regiment had wormed their way through the small clumps of trees and brush around the large open cliffs and had managed to get part way up the mountain. But here the murderous fire from the top had halted them, and as the casualties mounted, the Infantry felt that they hadn't the strength to move the rest of the way. This was their third night and the progress had been extremely costly. The crack German troops were making the Americans pay bitterly for each bit of ground gained. Unless the summit could be taken, the Germans could be reinforced and move down hill. There they could wipe out the slightest American foothold on the mountain at will.

It was already dusk when Able Company received word that they were to move up Mt. Porchia to support the 6th Armored Infantry. Captain Lester, the Company Commander, became sick, leaving the company under the command of Lieutenant Munson. It left Able Company to an apparent disadvantage for the lieutenant was a platoon commander and never before had led a company -- especially an engineer company as assault Infantry against a position that defied even the regular Infantry.

Lieutenant Munson picked six flank guards who were to prevent the column from being ambushed. Two of the flank guards would move ahead of the column, two at the sides, and two along the rear flanks of the column as it moved into position on the mountainside. The six guards were told to follow the column at a distance of fifty to seventy-five yards and to contact each other by voice as the column moved along.

Lieutenant Munson told the men that he realized that what they were about to do was tough and that they were inexperienced at such a task. But they were to try and remember what they had learned in training and to do the best they could. "Geronimo" he added, would be used as a signal to stop and hit the dirt or to rise and move forward. Consequently, when the word was whispered down the line, by the time it reached the rear, those men did not know whether to hit the dirt or to charge forward.

The password that night was "Puppy --- Love."

Able Company had been assembled near the tip of Mt. Maggiore, and the men had already begun to dig in. An occasional shell whistled over their heads and crunched into the road off in the distance behind them. The men were not taking chances. They knew from bitter experience how the sudden barrages could settle on the highway. It was a constant German interdiction target.

The men were told to roll up their bed rolls and pile them near the road where they could be picked up later. Then they began to hand in any possible identification that could possibly give away the name of the unit. Most of the men had old letters, and handed them over very soberly. They searched their wallets, and went through their pockets carefully. After a while, they stood around nervously until the details had been completed.

Lieutenant Munson then picked Corporal Valentine as the point man for he knew from previous incidents that Valentine had excellent judgement. Also T/5 Cata, Pfc. Clatterbuck, Private Martelle and T/5 Albers were to be with Valentine. These men could be depended upon to fight it out should the Company get in a ticklish situation. He then asked if there was any question. Valentine said, "I'm not sure that I can follow that route." The route to be followed in the darkness, would have been difficult for even a scout that had been over it a number of times. Lieutenant Munson, then decided that he would lead and that Valentine and the others would follow him closely. The platoon sergeants were then ordered to lead their platoons and the platoon officers were to follow behind their column.

As the column slowly marched along, Sergeant Buckley walked up and down, calming a man here and there and urging all to put forth their best efforts. He spoke softly to the men that they were not to worry, but to pray and trust themselves to God. His action did much to ease the tension of the men.

Sergeant Buckley then went to Lieutenant Munson to see what he could do. He made the lieutenant understand that it was as much his company as the lieutenant's and wherever the lieutenant went he would be with him.

Able Company followed the road to a stream at which point they crossed an improvised log bridge. They then passed the 48th's forward CP, crossed Highway 48, and continued for a short distance along a dirt road. Then they turned left heading towards Mt. Porchia. As the company turned off the road and started for the fields, they passed several farmhouses with groves of trees. Almost every two trees had wires stretched neck high between them. Able Company saw the wires in the gloom, and the quiet word "wire" passed from man to man as each man in the column would reach for the wire and stoop under it, meanwhile warning the man behind him.

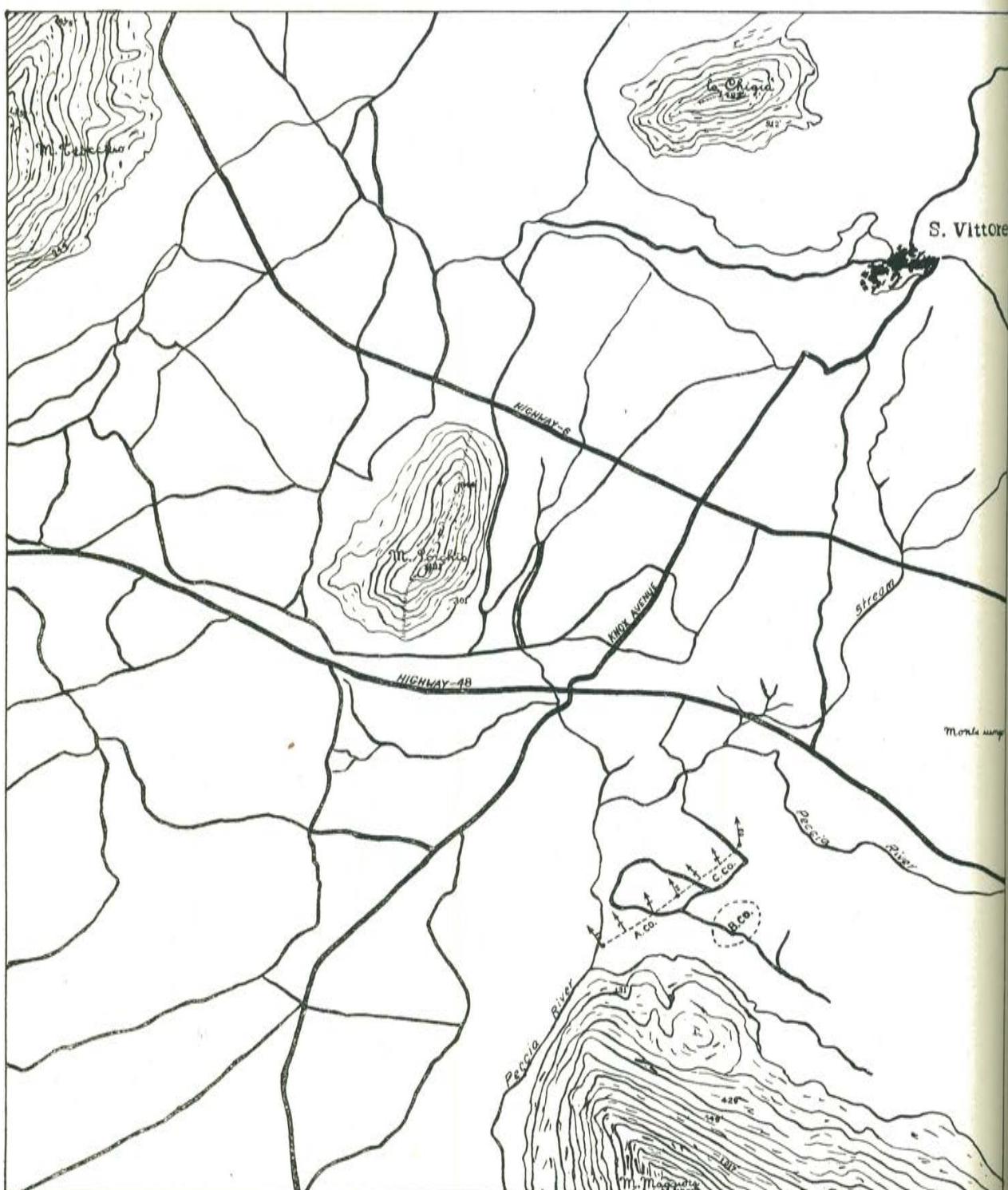
But Private Titcomb, working the flank guard on the Able Company rear was caught by surprise. He had to run around the farmhouses and try to keep the company in view. He was well over a hundred yards from the company now and had to cover almost twice as much distance as the company did in crossing the same ground. He weaved around the farmhouses and was racing across a farmyard trying to see the company when one of the neck-high wires caught him while he was running. His feet were jerked out from under him and he was thrown heavily to the ground. He lay there stunned for a moment, and then picked himself up and began running for the company again.

Able Company then came to another stream and the flank guards pulled in long enough to get across the bridge. Lieutenant Munson, meanwhile, had gone out in front to reconnoitre the path over which the company was travelling, and 1st Sergeant Buckley waited in charge of the company. When the lieutenant did not return after a short spell, Sergeant Buckley began to move the company forward toward the mountain.

German artillery began to pick at the column as the men of Able Company began to move through the open field behind the front line. The column had almost reached the far end of the last field when the shelling began again. Everyone hit the ground.

Pfc. Meyer, the aid man for the 3rd platoon, was near Staff Sergeant Jacobs when a mortar shell dropped close to the column. Jacob's body was riddled with shrapnel.

When Charlie Company left for Mt. Porchia they were in a highly nervous state for Lieutenant Katzbeck had returned from the meeting at the forward CP and said to the men, "We are going into the line. The Infantry is hard hit; be prepared for anything."



Infantry Missions at Mt. Maggiora and Mt. Porchia

Charlie Company, when they first reported to Colonel Definbraugh at the Infantry CP, were told that their mission was to reinforce the Infantry positions on the right flank of Mt. Porchia. They were to wait for an officer, who was to guide them into position. The men sought the safety of ditches which were partially filled with water to protect themselves from the shelling while they waited.

Meanwhile Baker Company was moving up to stubborn Obstacle 13, so that it could be completed to pass the tanks and tank destroyers around the mountain. If the attack carried, the other two companies and the Infantry would be badly in need of their supporting fire. The Germans would be sure to counter-attack, if the Americans carried the ridge. Baker Company realized the importance of their job that night. The Americans attacking the mountain during the night would have two jobs to do and both of them would be tough. They would have to first carry the summit and then they would have to hold it. It could not be held for any length of time unless the tanks could be maneuvered around Mt. Porchia into new firing positions on the far side of the mountain. The hill, itself, would effectively block off fire from their present positions.

Baker Company moved to the site, and quietly began struggling in the darkness with the culvert.

About nine o'clock, a call came into the Infantry CP from one of the company commanders that was at the foot of the mountain, requesting reinforcements immediately. He had intercepted a German radio message, "Counter-attacking with couriers and gun crews". Charlie Company of the 48th was then ordered to go up and reinforce the Infantry. An Infantry officer was designated as their guide. All along the way, the men were harassed by artillery fire. The men were shivering for they had laid in ditches for over an hour and a half, and their feet were soggy and wet. At Knox Avenue, near a knocked-out Mark V tank, they were suddenly stopped for an enemy patrol was sighted. The patrol slipped away.

Charlie Company silently deployed along the hill when the hurried order to attack was received from the Infantry company commander. Just then Lieutenant Kratch was wounded in the neck by shrapnel when a mortar shell fell close to the hole where the Infantry had their radio set up. Lieutenant Katzbeck sent a message back to the forward CP. "Going up to reinforce the Infantry to stop a heavy German counter-attack. The Infantry battalion with which we are working has only 45 men left. So this is it." The German counter-attack was materializing around the right flank of the mountain where the sheer sharp ridge dropped off into a steep rolling bank that reached almost to Highway Six and across the high ground on the right flank of the mountain. If the Germans succeeded, they would turn the whole flank of the forces attacking Mt. Porchia.

Lieutenant Reardon took over Lieutenant Kratch's platoon. In the attack the first platoon was to be on the left and the second platoon under Lieutenant Thames was to be on the right. The third platoon, under Staff Sergeant Russell, was to remain in reserve and to provide security for the other two platoons.

In the meanwhile, Able Company had laid down just before Knox Avenue where some of the Infantry were dug in. Some aid men that were going ahead to their forward aid station offered to guide Able Company through the first minefield. Lieutenant Munson then ordered, "Fix bayonets." Many of the men had used their bayonets to hack temporary holes in the mud, and now they couldn't get them on their rifles. The men were told to run across the bright roadway as fast as possible for the flat surface of the road would reflect any figure that crossed the open smooth stretch. The men did not have to be told. Most of them ran quickly over the open spot to reach the shadows of the trees and the high grass on the other side. There was a ditch on the far side, but the men found a small bridge and crossed over. Then they began to move through the field. The path grew narrower until it became a bare eight inches wide between the undergrowth that ranged along the sides. The order passed quietly along the file to be careful. The company was passing through a minefield. The men began to step carefully along the path watching each spot in front of their feet as they walked. The medics soon turned off to the left and the company continued straight, inching their way through the minefield.

Suddenly up ahead of the line, there was an explosion. Everyone hit the ground and clung to the path. There was some confusion up ahead and someone called for the Medics. First Sergeant Buckley, leading the company had hit a mine. Sergeant Buckley and three men were wounded. Sergeant Le Feverer was lying out in the field with blood streaming from his leg. Sergeant Pacquin and a medic

headed out into the minefield after him. Le Feverer's leg was dangling contorted at his side. Sergeant Pacquin pulled out his pocket knife and cut it off. The medic applied a tourniquet, gave the wounded man a shot of morphine and sprinkled sulfamilinide on the raw wound. But the company was in the attack and they could not wait. They continued through the field with the wounded Sergeant Buckley in the lead until they came to a small creek. There was no bridge to either side of them, so Sergeant Buckley led the men across the creek and into a line about 150 yards away from the base of the mountain.

Sergeant Buckley found Lieutenant Munson at the foot of the hill, and the lieutenant assumed command of the company again. Sergeant Buckley hadn't paused for first aid and was bleeding badly. He was ordered to the first aid station, and led a detail on the way back, safely through the field to where the other three wounded men were lying. Sergeant Le Feverer was evacuated on a stretcher made from rifles and blankets, and the small party of wounded and medics started back for Knox Avenue and the forward aid station.

At 2000, a message from Lieutenant Munson came back to the forward CP. "I'm convinced that the Americans have left the road below Mt. Porchia. Acting as the point man, I caught a German walking down this road. It was my first, I shot him."

Lieutenant Munson then sent Lieutenant Finnegan back to contact Major Linville to find out the situation. The major told Finnegan that "H-Hour" was at 2300. Able Company, on the left flank, was to attack, hitting diagonally for the right flank of the mountain. Able Company was to remain in position until they heard fire. Then they were to attract as much attention as possible and to make contact with our troops to the right; our Charlie Company reinforced with a few infantrymen.

About 2300, the air cracked with fire.

Lieutenant Munson ordered his men to "Run at top speed for the mountain and try to find cover behind rocks." He started to rush up the mountain, and looking behind, saw that no one was following him. He went back to his men and ordered them again to follow him. He dashed forward, but again no one was with him. Lieutenant Munson was about to go back and find out what the score was, when every man got out of his hole simultaneously and started to rush the hill, shouting at the top of his lungs. The men had, for a few moments, what one might have called stage fright. The men expected any minute to hear the sudden chatter of machine guns and the sparkle of small arms as they dashed across the field. But everything was strangely quiet.

Able Company began to work their way up the hill. The men scrambled from rock to rock and dashed behind clumps of trees wherever they afforded concealment from the Germans.

Still, there was no sign of the Germans. They seemed willing to let Able Company advance unopposed. The men grew careless, and there was the rushing, clattering noise of a man slipping on the loose shale and sliding down the hill. The twigs snapped and rocks bumped and bounced down the hillside as the men slipped and crawled upward toward the top. Some of the men were beginning to hold back, for they feared that it was a trap. Able Company was beginning to work too far to the left, and Lieutenant Munson called to them to move a little to the right so that they could attack from the center of the hill.

Lieutenant Munson was working up ahead of the Company now, and he had almost reached the top of the mountain.

All of a sudden, the darkness of the night was shattered as the red flashes from the top of the hill darted toward Able Company. Now and then there was a few sharp cracks as the Germans opened up with their machine guns and rifles.

The men scrambled for the cover of rocks and attempted to find a spot from which they could fire. But before Pfc. Jankowski could find cover he was shot through the leg. Able Company had made contact.

Lieutenant Hollar called for the machine gun. He wanted to direct fire on the German gun and keep the men down long enough for Able Company to take care of the Germans with the automatic weapons fire and small arms, and surround the machine gun position. The only man around was the man carrying the gun. The man with the tripod and the ammunition had become separated. The men

called his name several times, but he could not be located. He had gone with the wrong platoon in the darkness. It would be tougher now to storm the gun, but it would only be a waste of time and life to lie there in an exposed position and wait for the gun. Able Company began to work their way up again.

As soon as the Germans heard a sound, they would spray the spot with their gun. Able Company wormed forward through the rocks and hung low to the ground when the machine gun opened up.

Suddenly, Sergeant DeBoer saw something move in the shadows ahead of him. He waited tensely for a moment until it moved again. Sergeant DeBoer threw his rifle to his shoulder and called. There was no answer, but the form disappeared in the rocks. Sergeant DeBoer aimed quickly and fired. Rock splattered about Corporal Mays' face and cut him on the nose. It was only then that he realized that DeBoer had been calling to him. In the darkness, the second platoon had cut across the path of the third platoon. When DeBoer found that he had almost killed one of his own men, the excitement and shock made him sob softly. He wiped tears from his cheeks and knelt beside Mays while the tracers ripped over his head. He assured himself that Mays was all right. He then went back to his platoon and began leading them forward again.

Private Al Gouveia was moving carefully through the rocks, and came to an open space. He started across in a crouching run. One of the Germans threw a potato-masher grenade, and Private Gouveia tumbled into the rocks as it went off. Shrapnel and rocks hit him in the neck and body.

Meanwhile Corporal Pickula and a few men had maneuvered behind a large outcropping of rock. When the German machine gun opened up the next time, the corporal thought he saw where it was located. He called the other men and they crouched behind him. He told them that they would make a break for it and the next time the gun would open up they would drop a volley into the position. Corporal Pickula shouted, "Lets go" and dove outside the rock. A rifle shot rang out and he tumbled back into the arms of his men with a bullet wound in his thigh.

One of the Germans could speak perfect English and called to the men of Able Company, "I want to speak to your officer."

The only officer near the spot was an Infantry lieutenant. The lieutenant stepped out of cover and advanced halfway to meet the German. The German waited until the officer got in close, then raised his gun, shot the officer several times, and dashed behind some overhanging rocks before the officer fell and the men of Able Company could realize what had happened.

Lieutenant Munson had reached the crest of the hill and called to his men, "Come up as quick as you can." Then his voice was drowned out in a flurry of small arms fire.

But Able Company could not advance. The German mortars were beginning to break among them and the German machine gun at the top of the hill was raking them as they slid along the rocks on the mountainside. German riflemen concealed in the darkness would open up on them from the heights when they moved. Able Company could neither move forward or backward without drawing down a withering fire, and if they stayed where they were, the German mortars would cut them to pieces. Able Company dug in.





I N M E M O R I A M

SERGEANT JOSEPH C. SPECKER

HIS PERSONAL BRAVERY - SELF-SACRIFICE
AND DETERMINATION WERE AN INSPIRATION
TO HIS OFFICERS AND FELLOW-SOLDIERS.

R.
I.
P.



ON THE CREST

Baker Company continued to work during the night on the stubborn culvert at Obstacle 13 on Highway 48. The men had walked to the site silently and there had been no opposition on their way up. They could hear the fire fighting dimly from Mt. Porchia off to their right and they wondered how the other companies would fare during the bitter cold night.

The temperature had dropped to zero by midnight, and the puddles of water in the shell holes had turned to ice. The ground crunched with frost when the men walked, and the wind whistling through the valley, cut like a knife through the men's clothing. It was the worst kind of working weather, and the men of Baker Company went about their tasks hurriedly. They could not use their shovels on the mud, for the ice had turned it to sharp brown stone. Baker Company hacked a space for the culvert with their picks, and trundled the wooden sections of culvert into the hole.

Back at the forward CP, Colonel Goodpaster was worried. He had tried everything he could to keep his men away from action as Infantry. He had argued in vain, that the 48th could not be spared. Highway 48 was vital in the plans of Task Force Allen, and the colonel explained that the new road demanded constant attention before it could be completed. The long by-passes needed constant maintenance before they could pass the heavy armor to the front. Finally he had managed to save one company, but now the Infantry wanted that company, too. The losses had been severe on the mountainside, and there was only a handful of Infantry left to fight.

Lt. Schowalter, operations officer, notified the colonel that Baker Company had been put in reserve, but that he had left them at work until they were called. There had been no definite command. The colonel then asked for a volunteer to go with him up to Mt. Porchia. Cpl. Forester of the communications section, quietly said, "I'll go, Sir."

Lt. Schowalter then sent a message back to 1108th Engineer Group. "The British Major who is liaison officer with Task Force Allen has informed us of a probable tank move to the vicinity of 922140 tonight. If Baker Company is not called out as infantry I estimate that we will have route 48 and turn-off in shape." At 1005, that evening, a Lt. Swaney, the liaison officer and Lt. Swaite, the S-2, of the 6th Armored Infantry came to the CP. They were to lead Baker Company up to Mt. Porchia. They had just come down from the mountain and were both in a highly nervous state. Captain Mardin and the officers were arguing with them over the foolhardiness of taking our Baker Company with them. The officers were told that Baker Company had gone up that night to do engineer work and that they were not equipped to fight. The men were dressed for work and they carried engineer tools. It is true that they had machine guns for security, but they had no hand grenades or rifle grenades. They were in no condition to storm the mountain without assault weapons. Finally Lt. Swaite said, "There is no need of your Baker Company coming. I'll report to the colonel that I didn't get here till 1005 and since the attack started at 1000 it was too late to use you." But a short while after this, Colonel Andersson had phoned our rear headquarters, "Have Baker Company move out at once. March across to Highway Six to culvert on the left of the trail. Counter-attack under way. Meet guides at culvert."

Baker Company began to pile their tools into their trucks while arrangements were being made to obtain hand grenades and extra ammunition. They were just getting ready to pull out when Colonel Goodpaster returned to the advance CP. He told Lt. Schowalter not to send out Baker Company until

he saw what it was all about. He raced down in the jeep to 1108th Group Headquarters and in a short time returned. Baker Company was needed. The colonel shook hands with Captain Mardin and wished him luck. The colonel's face was all clouded up.

The mortar shells were then falling about the CP in increasing numbers. The Germans had a bead on the CP. Only a few minutes before one of the shells lobbed into the room next to the one that the forward CP men used. This room was packed full of German 16 centimeter shells loaded with high explosives. Providence must have blushed on those men for it was a dud. The colonel ordered them to quickly move back to the rear CP.

By this time Baker Company had moved out. Their assignment had changed some. They were to move up on the left flank. Baker Company moved to the base of the hill without opposition and began to move up. Off to their right there was a fire fight, and the men could see the crimson flashes of rifle fire, and the string of tracers as machine guns on the hill raked the ranks of the men to their right. Someone was taking a beating up on the hill.

It was getting light now as Baker Company waited dug in near the mountain. Finally the company moved. Enemy artillery picked at the column as Baker Company made its way to the mountain. They reached the bottom of the hill and started up through the half-light of dawn. Scouts roved ahead of the company and moved towards the crest, while the main body of men made their way slowly.

The artillery that had been shelling Baker Company intermittently began in earnest as the morning wore on. The men scrambled between the rocks and attempted to find cover. Suddenly at the right there was a scatter of small arms. Several shots were exchanged before the men of Baker Company found that they were shooting at Able Company men who were trying to move away from the mortar and machine gun cross fire that had Able Company pinned down. For the first time Baker Company had made contact with Able Company to their right.

Sergeant Tommy Googoo was sent out as a scout to locate the German machine gun that Able Company reported, so it would not pin down Baker Company as it had Able Company. He wormed his way up the jagged rocks amid the relentless artillery and mortar fire until he reached the crest of the mountain. He could not see the machine gun from there, but he realized from his position, he could remain hidden and observe any German attempts to knock out his company further down the slope. Meanwhile Pvts. Karlovich, Howell, and Nava, among others, had also reached the crest at several places along the hill. Most of the men dug in or found cover to wait for the rest of the company to work their way through the barrage below.

Sergeant Florian Schreiner and members of the third Squad of the first platoon were far in front of the main body of the company. Sgt. Schreiner began to work his way ahead of his men towards the top. A friendly artillery barrage opened up on the upper slopes of the mountain, and the shells began to burst dangerously close to the sergeant. One phosphorous shell almost covered him with white smoke, and the burning particles hit him. He found shelter behind a large rock and beat the burning particles out. Then he continued towards the top.

Lt. Buckley and his platoon were well over on the left flank and began to work around to the rear of the mountain. The lieutenant looked down the valley, and saw the railroad from where Highway 48 ended all the way to Cassino. He realized that he and his small force held an excellent observation point, and that they could spot any counter-attack as it was forming on the rear slope or the valley below.

The men were under terrific shellfire, so the lieutenant ordered them to dig in and hold. He would consolidate the left flank of the hill and hold tight to the mountainside.

Baker Company on the forward slope of the mountain could see the artillery rake the crest of the hill. The Germans were attempting to shell the crest of Mt. Porchia from the vicinity of Mt. Cairo, and their shells would either break on the enemy side high up near the crest, or miss the crest and go whizzing far down over Baker Company into the valley below.

Baker Company held the best possible position now. If they went any further up the hill, they would be caught by the fragments from the shells hitting the slender crest of Porchia, and if they attempted to hold the crest, the men would be under the pounding of enemy fire that was breaking on the friendly side of the mountain high up near the crest where Schreiner, Googoo, and the other

scouts were holding. Captain Mardin decided to hold the company where it was until he could straighten out the artillery and make liaison with Able Company. Then the two companies could make some sort of a coordinated attack and hold the crest until reinforcements were brought up. Captain Mardin ordered the men to dig in and set up their guns. Baker Company would hold what they had and wait until this was consolidated until they took another big bite. Able Company was dug in to his right and the two companies now held a line.

Charlie Company had been sitting between two fires. There was a counter-attack to their right far up on Highway Six which seemed to be moving diagonally toward their center and right. Then on the slope of Mt. Porchia there was a scattered fire of small arms and the sudden burst of German machine guns. They believed that this was the Infantry and Able Company, although there was no liaison. There was no one at all on the right side of the mountain except Charlie Company, and the men as well as the officers began to wonder what all the shooting was about and what was going on.

Charlie Company had to move up the hill just before Baker Company and Able Company began to dig in under the constant pounding of artillery and mortars, and the German machine gun fire that continually raked their positions.

Under the barrage of artillery, Charlie Company began to move up the slope. The company was taking the mountain slowly and methodically. Sergeant Joe Specker asked permission to work ahead of his platoon because the men had seen a machine gun firing up ahead. He didn't want to lead his squad into the possible direct fire of the gun.

Sgt. Specker returned to his squad and led them to a small outcropping of rock, where the fire of the enemy gun would pass safely over their heads. Then he took the squad's machine gun and a box of ammunition and stepped out from behind the rocks.

Almost immediately, the German riflemen saw him. In the half-light of dawn, they began firing at him. The bullets were banging from the rocks around him and were whistling over his head as he ran along the side of the mountain.

Suddenly one of the bullets found him, and he sprawled to the ground. He attempted to get up again, but could not. He continued to drag himself across the rocks as other bullets found him, until he located a place where he could direct the fire of his gun in plain view of them and opened up on the German nest before the Germans could change their position. His accurate fire destroyed the machine gun nest and drove many of the riflemen further up on the slope.

After waiting for a while, his squad heard the fire of his machine gun, and then began to infiltrate in the direction that he had taken. They could not find Specker during the night, and the men began to think that he had gone further up the hill. They continued without him, and it wasn't until late the next day when they learned that Sgt. Specker was dead. His body had been riddled with machine gun bullets.

The first platoon of Charlie Company on the left, under Lt. Reardon, continued to advance up the slope despite the mortar fire and potato mashers that the Jerries were directing at them. A number of men, including Lt. Reardon, Pfc. Duffy, Sgt. Olsen, and T/5 Santjer, reached the crest. The fighting was now almost hand to hand. Sergeant Olsen reached the top of the hill in the confused fighting as Charlie Company men dashed among the rocks. He saw two Germans and shot both of them. Later he and Lt. Reardon, accounted for three more as they directed their men in encircling the rocks. As he was moving through, two German grenades were thrown at him and he was wounded in the chest, arms, and leg. He continued to fight until his ammunition was gone. Then, when he realized that he could not help stem the counter-attack, he made his way back down the mountainside alone. The men of the first platoon would reach over and drop a grenade on the Jerries who were on the other side of the rocks. The Jerries would answer each grenade with a barrage of potato mashers. Lt. Reardon realized that the odds were too much against him; he was forced to withdraw and take down all the wounded. About three o'clock in the morning, they slipped silently down, bringing with them the men that had been hit. Pfc. Nelson, was already away from the crest of the mountain covering the rest of the men with his fire, when a bullet caught him high in the chest and he tumbled down the mountainside. When the first platoon of Charlie Company started their attack on the left, the second platoon had attacked on the extreme right flank. Lt. Thames told his platoon, "We are going to pay

a debt that we owe." As they advanced up the rocky mountainside, scattered small arms fire harassed them. One artillery shell landed about ten yards from the advancing men. To the right of the knoll that they were going towards, they could hear the steady sputter of machine gun bullets. One of the machine guns was firing from a cave-like hole, for its bullets gave off a hollow sound. As soon as the platoon reached the top of the mountain a German soldier raised up and fired point-blank at Sergeant Plowman. He missed. Lt. Thames returned the fire and the German tumbled over dead.

Lt. Thames said, "Our own artillery was directing a heavy barrage at this time. The shells were just skimming the crest of the mountain and the men could feel the wind of them. Right below the knoll, five enemy soldiers were in a group on their side of the mountain. One started towards the crest, and as he was advancing, he turned around and spluttered an order in German to his men. The second platoon succeeded in killing him and at least two others of that group. The remainder scattered. Just then for some unexplainable reason, a Jerry some fifteen yards below us swung his machine pistol and advanced towards us. We shot him point blank. By this time, the Jerries well knew where we were. They started to throw potato mashers at us. You could plainly hear them hit near us on the rocks, puff and go off. They threw at least twenty-five of them at us and then let loose with machine pistols. The bullets came over like a flame of fire."

T/5 Santjer dodged through the rocks in a flurry of bullets that twice wounded him. He crouched behind shelter, got a good shot at a German, saw him fall, and then dodged away. Another German soldier rose up, and Santjer did not have time to raise his rifle; he dove at the German and put the bayonet through him. There was firing all over the crest now, and the fighting was confused as both sides threw their weight into the struggle for the crest of the mountain. Santjer got another German and saw him tumble down the mountainside. He crossed a group of rocks and saw another. He fell, took a steady aim, and shot the German. As he rose, a German with a burp gun, stepped out from the rocks and opened up on Santjer. Santjer took the whole blast of the automatic at point blank range and fell to the ground, dead.

Lt. Thames then whispered to Sgt. Treloar to check the right flank. Pfc. Milburne, at that time, crawled over to the lieutenant and told him that his gun had jammed. Behind the protection of some rocks they finally got the gun working. It was just then that Pvt. Royce was hit in the shoulder and was bleeding badly. Lt. Thames ordered Sgt. Plowman to get him down the mountain. No sooner had he said this than a bullet hit the stock of Plowman's rifle, and ricocheted off.

Treloar, who by this time was on the right flank, was completely isolated. Enemy movement was noticed there. For twenty minutes the men waited, praying that in some way Sgt. Treloar would get back safely. The moon which previously had made visibility possible had now disappeared. It was pitch black. To prevent complete encirclement, Lt. Thames gave the order for the men to withdraw down to the Infantry CP.

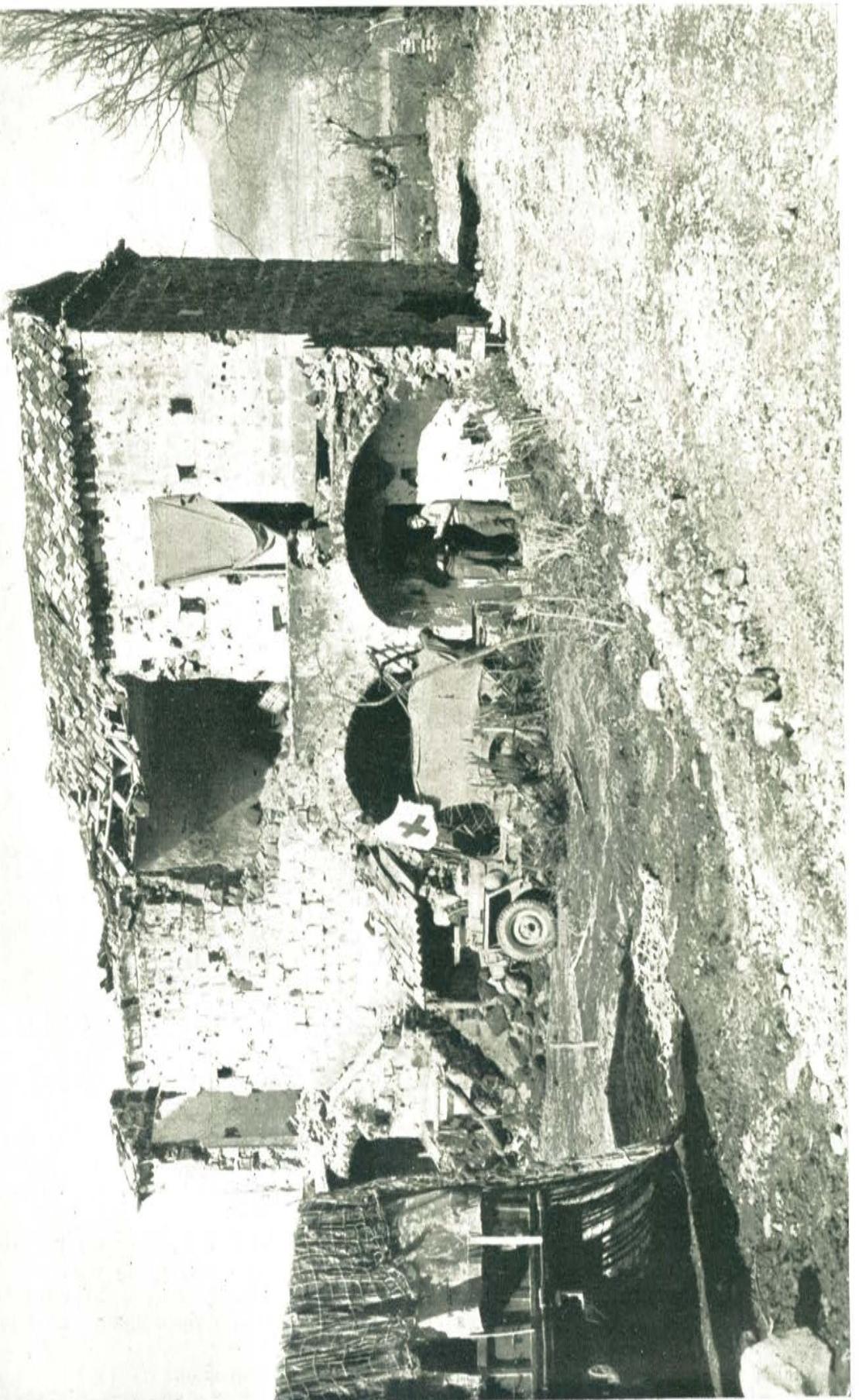
The Germans were standing on the rocks calling, "American Swine" and throwing grenades into the Americans as the small force tried to fall back orderly. German riflemen kept up their pressure, and raced from rock to rock to fire at the Americans. Charlie Company kept up a steady fire to cover their withdrawal, and more than one German was seen falling to the ground and rolling over and over through the rocks.

A grenade landed beside Pvt. Carroll and the concussion and shrapnel bounced him against the rocks, and knocked him unconscious. He was bleeding badly.

The Germans were quick to follow up their victory at the top of the mountain. They regrouped and pressed the Americans hard below. Their mortars zeroed in on the Charlie Company men and began to pound them as they tried to reach their former dug-in positions at the bottom of the slope. Cpl. Wendel had one shell land beside him, but he came out untouched, although wobbly from the shock. Another shell hit near him. He fell to the ground wounded.

Some of the men in Charlie Company's positions below tried to work their way up to help the men attempting to get down from the top. They were caught in the relentless mortar fire as the first of the elements from the crest worked through, and Pfc. Duffy set up his machine gun to cover the withdrawal. The machine gun helped for a while and the men from the crest hurried to get out of the hail of bullets that were coming down from the crest and the Germans on their heels from above.

Forward CP at Mt. Porchia



The added reinforcements, although pinned down by the fire, helped to cover the few remaining men that had survived the fire fight at the top of the hill, and together, the two parties attempted to reach their positions.

German machine guns opened up on them again, and the Germans probed at the dark clumps of bushes and the jumbled rocks with their tracers as the Charlie Company men, half crouching, darted for cover.

The two parties reached the rest of the company and began to dig into the rocky ground with knives, bayonets or helmets as they tried to escape the mortar barrage that the escaping party brought down with them. The Germans followed up until the combined fire of the company drove them away.

The Germans must have estimated the strength of the firing line from the number of flashes.

After a few more sporadic exchanges of small arms, Charlie Company settled down for the rest of the night sweating out the mortars.

Sgt. Treloar had managed to slip through the Germans and returned to the company safely.

Lieutenant Katzbeck had been wondering where the other companies were. He had not been able to contact anyone during the entire night there on the mountain, although he had seen a great deal of fire off to the left of his company's positions and presumed it to be Able and Baker Companies further down on the mountain. But there had been no one along his section of the crest except his own small party which had caught the counter-attack and dulled it.

Lt. Katzbeck was close to the Infantry CP when a shell landed in the center of a group of Infantrymen, killing nine of them instantaneously. Lt. Kratch was again wounded, this time in the foot. The concussion was such that it knocked Lt. Katzbeck flat on his stomach and for a few seconds he was in a dazed condition. With the shrapnel that was cracking through the air was a large rock which landed squarely on the lieutenants' back. For a moment, Lt. Katzbeck thought that he had a large shrapnel wound in his back but was much relieved to find out that it was only a large rock.

It was getting light now, and the lieutenant prepared to make liaison in the morning so that the three companies could coordinate an attack on the hill together.

The last of the Infantry had almost disappeared. Their bodies lay all over the face of the mountain along with those of the Engineers. There had been only a handful of men from the Sixth Armored Infantry left on the hill when the 48th went up, and these small sections had fallen in with the companies as they advanced. There had been many casualties among them along the way, and after the last attack, there were hardly any Infantry at all on the mountain.

The 48th waited along the hill. Baker Company was tied down on the left with friendly and enemy artillery combing the high slope of the hill. Able Company was in contact with Baker in the center sections of the mountain, but they could not move without drawing machine gun fire, and an accurate mortar barrage walked up and down before their positions on the bottom slope of the mountain. Charlie Company was far out on the right, without contact with the other two companies. They had stopped a German counter-attack and had been hard hit. They had made the crest once, but had been driven back. As the sun broke over the mountains to their left, all three companies were dug in and pinned down on the lower slopes of the mountain. The Germans had stopped their first attempt to take the hill.

During the early light of morning, Lieutenant Munson had led some of the men from Able Company back down to the valley after he had ordered the rest of Able Company to dig in. He wanted to get hand grenades and ammunition to take the nests up on the mountain, by passing down the railroad above Highway 48, and cutting around in back of Mt. Porchia to attack from the other side. It was foolish, the lieutenant reasoned, to attack the machine gun from the front. If they could get around to the rear, the machine gun would be little trouble.

Lieutenant Munson warned the men to be quiet and not answer any shouts coming from the hill, for the Germans had been yelling in English up on the mountain, trying to make the Americans answer so that they would disclose their positions. The men had only gone a short way when there was a shout from the mountainside. The company stopped and the voice again called to them and asked them where they were going.

Lieutenant Munson called, "Back to camp," and the column moved on.

The fields that Able Company had crossed to get to the mountain were taking a pounding. Shell after shell exploded in the fields. Able Company would have to cross through the artillery fire to reach Knox Avenue. Lieutenant Munson elected to follow the shelter of the base of the mountain to the railroad, and then move down the railroad tracks to where they ended in Highway 48.

The company moved around the mountain fast. They were crossing a small knoll when there was a blinding flash and a loud noise at the head of the column.

One of the Germans had thrown a grenade. As the grenade exploded, the flash momentarily blinded Lt. Munson, and he was captured by an enemy patrol. He turned to his men and called the warning that sent his men into a skirmish line around the knoll.

The men called in the darkness but there was no answer. They opened up with their M-1s and sub-machine guns, but there was no answering fire. The grenade had landed near Lieutenant Munson and sprayed shrapnel in his shoulder. He fell to the ground and pretended to be dead. The Germans kicked him a few times, took his sub-machine gun, and ran back down the knoll. The lieutenant waited a while, picked up a carbine, and attempted to run. Able Company was moving up the knoll to try to recapture their lieutenant. Cpl. Kobza saw a man dimly sneaking through the brush at his end of the line. He dropped to the ground, and sighted down his rifle. He held his fire for a moment, trying to find out if it was the lieutenant or not. He could not fire. He cursed softly and watched the man run to cover. He never did find if it was the escaped lieutenant or a member of the German patrol.

Lieutenant Munson, dashed through the brush attempting to reach his company again, but he did not know which direction to move. The Germans were on three sides of him, and Able Company seemed to be advancing into a certain trap.

He bounced over a small knoll almost into the arms of two Germans. He brandished his carbine, and the Germans threw up their hands. The lieutenant made his way back to the first aid station with his prisoners, where he was sent back to have his wound tended. But Able Company was in trouble. If they were not already encircled, they believed that they were now in a pocket with Germans on three sides. The best route for them was to move in the direction that they had already taken. A path would take them to the railroad tracks, and they could follow the tracks out.

Able Company had not moved far when a machine gun opened up, and there was the sound of rifle fire on both flanks. Several men were hit by the machine gun. Able Company dropped to the ground and opened fire. Sergeant Stern, near the center of the line, called for the Germans and Able Company to cease firing. He stood erect and told the Germans that they were encircled. There was a pause, and then Stern continued to speak to the men in German. "Come out," he said, "we will not shoot you. If you stay where you are, American troops in your rear will surround you in a few minutes."

There was a short scuffle in the bushes ahead of Able Company, and then six Germans carrying their machine guns, walked out.

Able Company found their wounded and placed guards over the prisoners and then made their way to the road. There, an Infantry colonel found them and directed them back up the mountain again.

About ten o'clock in the morning, Charlie Company sent two volunteer parties to clear out the snipers on the top of the mountain. Lt. Reardon went up on the right flank of Charlie Company and with him were Sgt. Brahmer and Pfc. Duffy. To the left of Lt. Reardon went Lt. Thames and his party. When Lt. Reardon's men got a third of the way up the mountain they were pinned down by machine gun fire. They lay there for a short while and then continued to work their way up behind the terraces. It was about then that Lt. Thames spotted a machine gun which was about 300 yards away. He hurriedly sat down behind some mesquite grass, zeroed in and fired, killing the sniper. Thames' party then succeeded in flushing two more snipers. The Germans at that time, opened up at them from the crest of the mountain. They returned the fire and succeeded in killing another, thus diverting the attention of those on the crest from Lt. Reardon and his men.

The morning wore on, but there was no action on Porchia. The three companies lay in their positions, as an Infantry machine gun company came up to the mountain and set up at the base. Then orders began to reach the three companies. They were to move out at four in the afternoon and consolidate the mountain. Most of the men believed that if last night was any indication of how bad the Germans wanted the mountain, the men of the 48th were in for a tough fight.

THE BLUE RIBBON

The three companies lined up abreast, and when the jump-off signal sounded, they began to move up the hill, firing as they advanced. It was full afternoon, and a bright sun steamed at the frost of the morning. The men moved around the rocks and passed through the brush as the machine guns below opened up over their heads. A few German riflemen and snipers tried to organize a resistance, but they were speedily knocked out. Near the top, the going was tougher, and the tired men slipped between the rocks with their guns ready. Some of the Germans did not attempt to fight. They stepped out into the open with their hands above their heads.

Over on the right flank, Lieutenant Reardon was leading Charlie Company into the rocks where they had fought off the German counter-attack the night before. Lieutenant Reardon slipped carefully between the big rocks at first, and then turned and shouted to Lieutenant Thames who was nearing the rocks with his platoon, "Hey, Harry, come on up. There's plenty of room. No one is up here." Lieutenant Thames and his platoon hurried to the top and outpost the rocks above. Charlie Company hurried to the crest of the hill and took up positions where they could have a clear field to fire down the other side of the mountain.

Meanwhile, Able and Baker Companies were working abreast up the mountain. An 88 kept firing at them, and came in every time the men bunched up. Finally some tank men saw a puff of smoke coming from a house at the left rear of the mountain. The tankmen moved around to where they could fire at the house and calmly put a round through the window. The Germans raced out of the house and ran down the valley.

The companies up on the hill were meeting only scattered rifle fire and mortars as they approached the top. They quickly crossed the sharp ridge of the mountain and moved down to positions on the other side. The Germans began to skim 88s over the ridge. The shells broke on the far side, and whistled over the heads of the crouching engineers to drop into the valley behind them. After a while the shells dropped lower so that every now and then, a shell would break among their positions with a loud roar. The men moved back to the top and took up positions on the far side beneath the protection of the crest. There the shells would not hit them. Most of the shells were whizzing several feet above their heads as the Germans tried for the ridge. Only a small outpost line was held on top of the mountain. The men chosen to outpost the guard, dug holes between the rocks and sweated out the shells that exploded into their positions.

Lieutenant Colonel Ringsack, who was the commanding officer of the 6th Armored Infantry, requested that the 48th advise him on how to best lay out fortified positions so as to repulse strong German counter-attacks that were expected. Immediately Colonel Goodpaster with Lieutenant Schowalter went to the top of Mt. Porchia.

For a moment it seemed as if Colonel Goodpaster had a charmed life. For while he was at Porchia a shell burst close to the window of the room at Battalion Headquarters that he and Captain Van Campen occupied. At that moment, Captain Van Campen was resting in his bed. Shrapnel whistled through the window and pierced his foot. The colonel's bed received the force of the shell, for his bed was littered with shell fragments.

Colonel Goodpaster was then busily engaged on Mt. Porchia laying out fortified positions. A mortar shell broke close and shrapnel tore into his right shoulder. At the same moment, Colonel Ringsack was so badly wounded that, it seemed improbable that he would live. Lieutenant Schowalter escaped untouched. Colonel Goodpaster, despite his wound, rendered first aid to the Infantry officer and saw to it that he was evacuated. He and Lieutenant Schowalter then searched for the next in command and spent several hours going over the defensive set-up. The colonel then made his way down the mountain for treatment.

The men dug in for the first night. Although there was a rumor that they would be relieved during the night, but as the sky grew dark, there was no line of reinforcements making their way across the valley. The men prepared to spend another cold night on the mountain.

After 48 hours in the bitter cold, a number of the men had trench feet. Their shoes had been soaked and the constant cold made them numb. The men walked without feeling to their foxholes, and lay shivering on the ground. Their strenuous climbing had made them thirsty. The only water to be had was from the puddles that were in the bottom of the holes and mule tracks. They drank it and shivered more. The night was without action. There was an occasional shell and one or two snipers kept a steady fire on the outpost line. But most of the men were so tired that in spite of the cold and the damp ground, they fell asleep in their holes. The guard was divided so that some of the companies were constantly awake, and could give warning to the rest of the men if a German counter-attack should materialize during the night.

The next morning, the Infantry walked to the positions with packs full of "K" rations. These were issued to the men, who munched the dry crackers and the tasteless cheese as they watched the sun come up.

Later in the day a couple of German planes came over Highway Six and the 48th watched the show from grandstand seats as the airplanes skimmed over a bridge and dropped personnel bombs. The men of the 48th wondered if they would be next, but after darting across the valley, the enemy planes gained altitude over the mountains and moved away from the valley.

By afternoon, the men were so cold that they could hardly move. The Infantry had made the climb again with fresh water and rations for the 48th, but the two days of cold food had made them all sick. They could hardly eat, and many of the men threw their rations away.

As the light began to fade, a thin column of Infantry crossed the valley below, and moved up the mountainside. The commanders reported to the three engineer companies, and the relief was effected. The 48th was going down.

When the companies reached their bivouac areas, casualties were considered severe. But men kept coming in all day. Many of the men had been with the Infantry, or had been in positions on the hillside where they did not know about the relief, or had been involved in medical or other details. Many of the men were hospitalized for trench feet and pneumonia from the effects of the three icy January nights on the mountain-top.

It had been a tough battle for the 48th. In the past two weeks, a fresh outfit, had constructed a road which was a final test, under fire, of every possible job that combat engineers could do. Then a few nights later, they had acted as assault infantry to take a hill against all types of Infantry weapons. The crack Hermann Goering Division was the flower of the German Army -- and the 48th had beaten them.

From here the 48th dropped back to Ceprani for 48 hours to lick its wounds and reorganize. The men were given new equipment to replace that which had been lost on the mountain, and they had a day's rest from the tough fight they had passed through. Many of the men had gone for three days and nights without sleep, and all of the men had been three days without warm food.

For this action on Mt. Porchia the 48th received the Presidential Citation which reads as follows:

"THE 48TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION is cited for its outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy, during the assault on Mount Porchia, Italy, between 4 January and 8 January 1944. As part of an engineer combat group, this battalion was assigned the mission of opening and maintaining axial supply routes for a task force assault to capture and occupy an enemy mountain stronghold. The 48th Engineer Combat Battalion not only performed its normal engineer-

ing tasks under fire from a fiercely resisting enemy, but also attacked as infantry during bitter fighting to secure the objective. During the engagement a gap developed on the left flank of the task force, and the engineers courageously fought to secure this flank and prevent enemy penetration. As the attack progressed, infantry losses were severe, and all reserves had been committed to action in the effort to destroy enemy resistance. All companies of the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion were then committed to action as infantry in the final and successful assault to drive the enemy from the task force objective. The courage and fighting determination exhibited by the officers and men of the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion were vital factors in the successful accomplishment of the task force mission, and their performance reflects the heroic traditions of The Corps of Engineers." By command of Lieutenant General Clark.

Then the men moved back to Highway 48 to give it the maintenance that it needed so badly during the three days that the 48th had been taken off. Also to take over Highway Six from the 235th Engineers who, too, were in need of reorganization.

Soon after Mt. Porchia, 96 replacements arrived to fill up the ranks of the companies. Almost a hundred men had been lost through wounds and trench feet on the mountain.

After three days, the roughly cut by-passes had been churned into furrows by the tracks of the passing armor, and the shelling had ripped huge craters in the road surface.

With Mt. Porchia gone, the Germans had pulled back a mile to Mt. Trocchio, and the road had to be built forward around Mt. Porchia. The men attacked Obstacle 13, which had been started and stopped a dozen times, and licked it in one day. There was another half mile of track to be swept and ties to be lifted. Then the bulldozers pushed away the earth and the graders moved up and down to smooth off the crown.

The 48th worked down the road in places where they could not have gone before. Now the mountain was our friend, for it hid a lot of the road from the Germans. The end of the road near the CP buildings at Mignano was no longer under observed fire. The Germans would throw an interdictory shell every so often at the crossroads of Mignano, and drop a searching barrage into the British bivouac area off the highway, but the road was more free of the endless barrages that had settled over the area while the men were engaged in the first work of converting the road into a highway.

The winter was making work difficult. The men were frozen on the trucks when they reached the sites, and were glad to get to work and move about. Their heavy clothing made working difficult, and they were clumsy when they handled the culvert sections or attempted to run cables around the stalled British vehicles in the long by-passes.

Many of the men, at this time, were receiving passes to Naples for a day, or to Caserta for five days. Both towns were a relief for the soldiers, for somehow it did not seem so cold in the towns as it did in the valley of Cassino.

The main feature of Caserta was the King's Palace, a ranging square monument, that took up a great portion of the town.

Caserta was a nice town as far as Italian towns go. It lacked the glamour of a big city, but it had almost everything that a man on pass could desire.

Most of the soldiers merely used the palace as a landmark to find their way back to the King's Stables where they were quartered for their rest period. It was a waste of space and stone to many of us.

Caserta had many small shops where the soldiers would pay outrageous prices for small souveniers to send home. The stores had almost everything we could ask for. There were small rings engraved with "Naples," "Cassino" or "Caserta" or "Pompeii," and the visiting soldier could take his choice. Then there were shell bracelets and millions of cameos. Cameos were in all sizes, shapes and descriptions. Some of them good, some of them bad, but all of them were expensive.

A G.I. bar was on one corner at the square, where the thirsty soldiers could stop for vino and red wine, before exploring the rest of the town.

The main thing about the rest center wasn't Caserta or the things that could be done there. It was the rest. It was wonderful to know that for five whole days you would not hear the screaming shells, and that you would spend the night in a building far in the rear, with nothing other than an occasional

air raid to worry about. To most of the frontline soldiers, an air raid was a very good show and had a movie beat. There was a lot of difference in a good air raid and a shelling. Somehow, an air raid wasn't something to be afraid of. It was just a chance to let people far back in the rear know that a war was going on up the valley.

Many of the men at the Caserta Rest Center would stay in Caserta for about two days to rest up, and then take the next couple of days in Naples. At this time Naples was the main attraction in all of Italy. There was no other town that could compare with Naples.

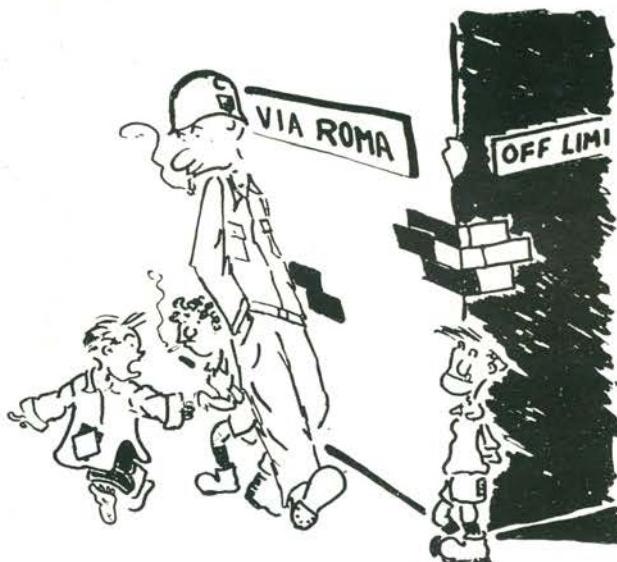
"See Naples and Die" the Italians would tell us. Whether they were talking about the effects of a one week stay or the terrific odor that permeated from the closely-packed endless rows of houses, we never did determine. But to some extent, they were partially right.

Naples is a beautiful place from a distance, but like the many paintings that picture the scene, it is spoiled by a closer inspection.

The city lies comfortably on a curving stretch of land that stretches from Sorrento past the Isle of Capri to Pouzzouli, where the land dips away from the sea. The purple mass of Mt. Vesuvius, rising behind the town, provides an unrivaled background for the blue-green sea that leads to the white houses with their red roofs. The whole thing is splashed with color, not gaudily, but with solid whites and reds and blues trimmed against the deep purple of Vesuvius and the grey cloud of haze that hangs perpetually above the mountain.

The Italians tried to make Naples live up to its reputation. There is an attempt at a park along the water edge near Santa Lucia, but the famous fishing wharves were no longer romantic to the visiting GIs.

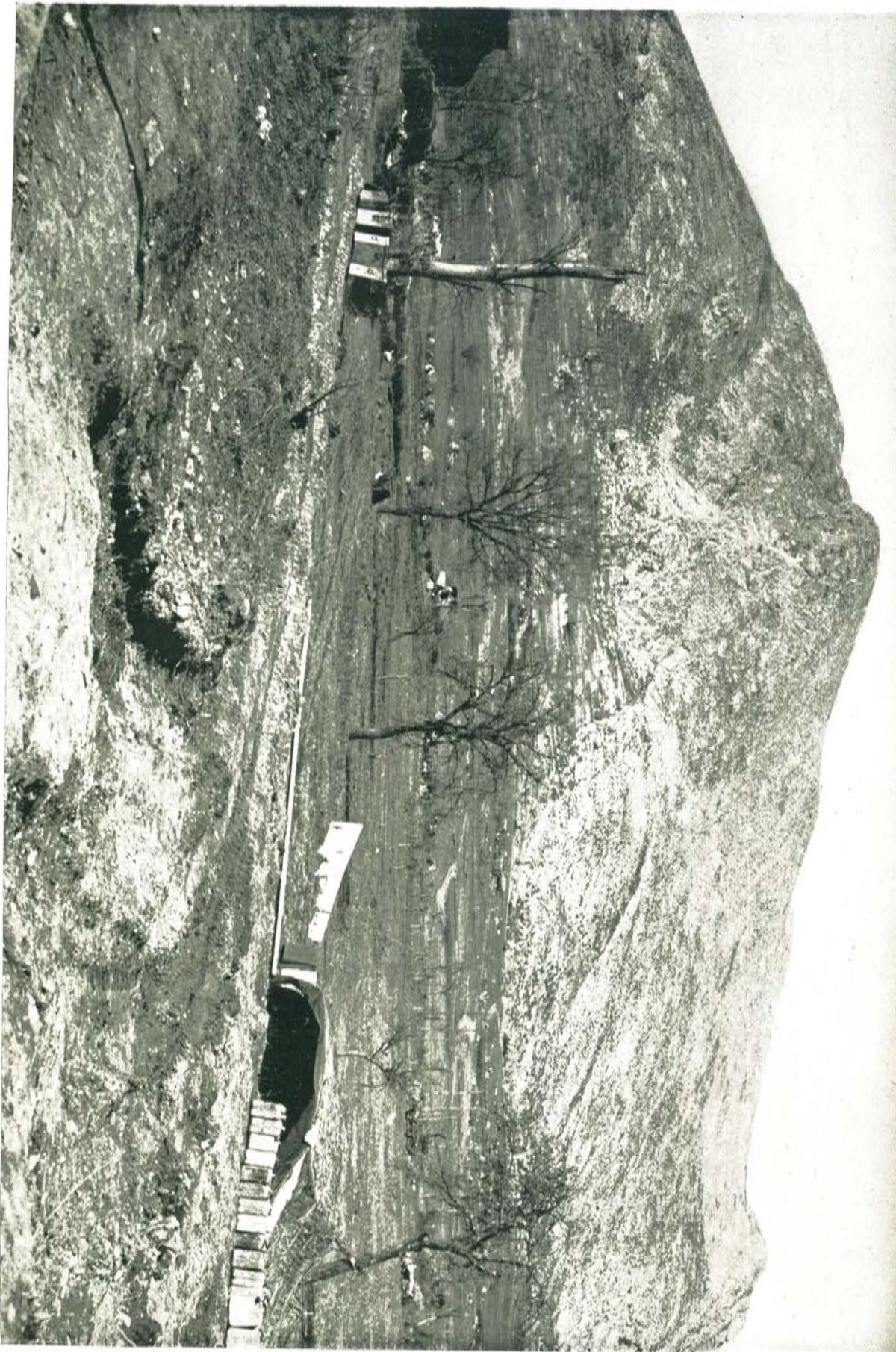
Via Roma was far more romantic. The bustling afternoon crowd included a large proportion of the attractive Neapolitan women, made famous by the old bards, who never did try Times Square in Manhattan.



But the side streets provided the visiting soldiers on a day pass with amusement. Little kids in broken English would surround the unwary soldier with offers of, "Hey Joe, champagne? You wanna eat? -- got bifsteak, potatoes, cognac?" and offered a variety of other wares.

Most GIs were content to spend a comfortable afternoon and a great deal of cash enjoying the hospitality of some Italian family. Or else we could pound the streets, buy watches and shawls in the thousands of tiny shops, or just look in an amateur sort of way for whatever adventure might be in store in some part of the city where there weren't quite so many soldiers looking for adventure, too.

There was a Red Cross club that attracted a lot of attention as a meeting place, and a snack bar where we could get some coffee and a couple of cakes, but the Italian houses were far more popular for a spaghetti dinner.



Mt. Porchia from Highway 48

Then, too, there were three movies in town. Most of us came a long way, and passes were somewhat rare, so we preferred wandering than to spending the afternoon in a movie. But the afternoon shows were always packed, and there was a long line for the evening performance.

But for the most part, the Via Roma, held some sort of spell over the Americans. The street would be a mass of brown during the afternoons, as the soldiers threatened their way going nowhere in particular.

After two or three visits, most of us had connections for amusement and dinner. Each of us knew one or two houses somewhere in town where there was a fair menu and the family knew us.

But the main feature of Naples were its kids... ragged, dirty, and in all sizes, who pounced upon the soldier with pleas for bonbons and chewing gum, and entreaties to visit his house, where there were all manner of good things to eat and do.

No sooner would we climb over the side of the truck, than the kids would swarm about us, dragging us, pulling us, and begging us to go with them. They were a travelling Baedecker as a street directory. They knew short cuts and streets that were off limits and streets that were on. They would lead us through alleys and houses, across terraces, and up and down steps, urging us on with cries about how swell it was at their house.

The Americans would have been lost without the kids.

The houses were filthy, but the people were happy and the streets were narrow and twisting. The place had a horrible odor that permeated the whole city, and it was hot in the summer time and cold in the winter, and there wasn't much to do that wasn't "Off Limits." The prices in the stores were exaggerated, the cognac and vino were bad, and the women were below our American standard of beauty, but nevertheless they were still pretty. But a pass to Naples was as coveted among the 48th as a bottle of red wine, and welcome as a package from home.

The 48th was keeping the Cassino Valley open for traffic. Highway Six and Highway 48 required constant work. As the tanks and supply trucks needed more of Highway 48, the road was extended to meet their needs. As the tanks would move up a hundred yards every two weeks there would be another hundred yards of railroad track to tear up and mines to be swept, as well as an occasional culvert.

The last culvert that Able Company completed was a tough one. The site was bad in the first place, and everything seemed to go wrong there until the job was finished.

When the company arrived at the site, there was a lot of water backed up by the railroad embankment and the blocked culvert, which had not permitted the water to drain. Drift wood had floated to the small opening that the water had made in the embankment, and the logs were piled up at the site with debris built up behind them.

Able Company's first job was to permit the water that had been dammed up to drain so that the men could get down into the crater and work on the culvert. It was a cold wet job, for the men had to get down in the water and loosen the logs so that the water could drain through the embankment. At first the men thought that the site would need only one culvert, but it was finally decided that the gap was far too long. Two culverts would be needed.

The men swept the shoulders thoroughly for mines, but none were found. The mine sweeping crew then finished sweeping the embankments and reported that there were no mines, so the bulldozer was ordered to move up. The first scoop of earth that the dozer took rolled a fat, black tellermine out of the road. Luckily it did not explode, and the men quickly disarmed it. After that, the men worked tensely, for they were afraid that the bulldozer might find another mine that the sweeping crew could not find.

The road level of the culvert had dropped below water level, and the men had to smooth out the road surface, working in water half way up to their knees.

The men were just about sure that everything had gone wrong that possibly could, when a couple of German planes began to circle the site. The men dispersed and awaited the bombs, but they did not come. However, a few aerial bursts broke over the site just to make the men more uncomfortable.

The men decided that if they dug out the ground from where the water was spilling over the road, they could piece their culverts, and then push the banks over the culverts with the bulldozer. This

would make a gentle slope leading to the culvert, and there would be at least two solid feet of earth over the top of the culverts.

Accordingly, the men splashed down into the water, and after a lot of hard work, most of the water was splashing through a cut in the embankment. The men crawled out of the chilly water and moved toward the culvert sections. All that they would have to do now was drop in the culvert and cave in the banks.

Suddenly with a sliding crash, the entire bank slid downward and the rock and dirt rolled into the cut which the men had shovelled.

There was nothing to do now except shovel out every bit of dirt and try it over again. Besides that, their plan of toppling the bank into the cut was gone. Now they would have to haul gravel to fill the site.

The trucks were sent for gravel, and the men splashed once more into the water to dig out the bank which had tumbled into the cut. After much hard digging, the cut was clear again, and the culvert was placed. The gravel trucks poured their loads on top of the culvert and the bulldozer moved over the finished culvert to complete the job.

The new culverts were much higher than the original culverts of the railroad, and even after that, there was a small lake along Highway 48.

The tanks and artillery were continually asking for by-passes as they maneuvered for firing positions in the valley. Often the by-passes contained only the faint suggestion of a road, and the path would have to be built over the soggy marshes of the lowlands in the valley. One of the best methods of building a road was to wrap bundles of saplings together to make corduroy. These bundles would be distributed over the ground, and then gravel would be thrown on the bundles to fill in the rough spots and make the road a bit more even. After traffic passed over the corduroy for some while, the road would make a reasonably hard surface.

Baker Company was called out on a by-pass job on the night of January 12th. The men heard rumors that they would work during the night, and the rumors were always bad. There was a tank by-pass needed right under the German's nose far up on Highway 6. At dusk, the 1st and 3rd platoons of Baker Company loaded up and reached the site by seven o'clock in the evening. However, by nine o'clock the officers realized that the task was too great for the two platoons and the 2nd platoon was called up from Knox Avenue. It was a nice night to work, if the nights could be nice, mostly because there was hardly any moon, and the hills that the Germans held were just dark blurs against the blackness of the night. The men thought it would be a good job. The trucks carrying the corduroy drove to the site, and the men unloaded them. They then began laying it. Everything went along fine until eleven o'clock when the moon rose, and cast a brilliant white light over the entire valley. The men now had more light, and they could see what they were doing. They had grown confident that the Germans either could not see them from their positions or for some reason were conserving their ammunition for the night.

That was a bad mistake, for about ten minutes after the moon rose, the first shell came in. It screamed towards the corduroy, and crunched about five feet from the road. Lieutenant Kincer and Corporal Snodgrass were injured by bits of shrapnel. Sergeant Lucas, who was the closest to the bursting shell, was dazed by the concussion and his nose and face were all bloody. The men scattered and hit the ground. They knew that more shells would follow. They did not have long to wait, for the next shell came in with a terrifying shriek that made the men's nerves as tight as piano strings. After a few more shells came in the barrage ended as abruptly as it had started, and after a minute interval, the men began work again. This time the men were alert and kept one ear open for orders and the other open for the low whistle that would give them a second to hit the ground.

Soon a barrage settled again on the area and the order was given to load up and return to camp.

The next night Baker Company tried it again. The night was dark and the visibility poor. The men worked hurriedly with the corduroy, and it soon looked as though the by-pass would be completed. But a half hour after the men of Baker Company had started, the shells began to scream in again. After some debate, the officers decided that it was enough work for one night, as the Germans would soon cause more casualties if the men worked any longer.

Baker Company loaded up again, and resolved to finish the job the third night. The tankers said that they would need the road the following night, so the men of Baker Company realized that they would have to finish the road no matter how severe the shelling might become.

The third night, the number of men needed for the job was cut to a minimum and the men returned to the job once more. The men worked for an hour watching the fateful hill behind them and measured in their minds the amount of work yet to be done against the time when the moon would come over the mountain. All was quiet and still as the road continued. The men knew that it was getting near the hour when the moon would rise.

Suddenly, the valley was flooded with light as the moon broke through the clouds. For a split second, all work stopped. Then it began again. The men strained their ears for the first whistle of the incoming shells. The hours wore on, and the men were tense and nervous from listening for the expected shells. More and more rolls of corduroy were laid, and when the last truck rolled up, they were beginning to wonder what would happen. The last rolls were laid, and still there was no fire. The road was completed with time to spare, and tanks rolled across to their appointed positions.

The 48th, in the Liri Valley, continued to work and wait and wonder when the monastery would fall. The Infantry advanced across the valley between Porchia and Trocchio. They had a tough fight going up Trocchio, but finally, that too was taken. Now there was nothing but the Rapido River and the Monastery Hill to keep them from spreading out up the Liri Valley. Obstacles 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 were completed as the 48th kept pace with the Infantry, and continued to make the change from railroad to express highway along Highway 48.

At one time, Able Company located 39 mines under the gravel along the railroad bed. They thought it was clear and sent a bulldozer up. The bulldozer found the 40th, and the roadgrader following, found the 41st. The men were badly shaken up and slightly scratched, but the only casualties were the pieces of equipment which were out of operation for some time after contact with tellermines.

The entire roadbed had to be swept for mines almost by hand. The men would fix bayonets to the end of their rifles and move along slowly, probing each step into the gravel of the roadbed. A signal man stepped on the three-prong igniter of an S-mine and bent it over without it going off, and another group of Infantrymen wandered into a group of S-mines and almost all were casualties. Pfc. Brissette from Able Company, was probing for mines, and stood with his feet apart when one of his buddies called to him not to move. Between his feet, was a tellermine.

An occasional aerial burst sprayed the men at work, and the interdictory fire would fall on all of the work sites periodically. As soon as a shell hit, the 48th would load up their shovels and move over to the spot with a truckload of gravel and fill up the crater. The supply and ammunition trucks were using the road now, and the 48th kept its fingers crossed that a shell would never hit one of these vehicles, for they could imagine a lot of hard work filling up the hole.

The 48th settled down to hard work while the rumors of attacks and counter-attacks and successes and defeats piled up in the news from home. But the 48th could see the same battle-line every morning up on Highway 48. The frozen men settled down in the snow to griping and wondering when they would get it-now or later.

The Rapido River was about forty feet wide at the end of the railroad where Highway 48 was working to the banks. It was a sluggish stream during the winter, and often it was iced over completely. It wasn't quite cold enough during the latter part of January to coat the surface with ice, and there was enough water coming from the mountains to make it a little more swift than usual.

The Rapido was a natural tank obstacle, and the Infantry patrols that did get across, had to wade the water both ways. Most often, the patrols' did not come back, for the Germans covered the far side with fire and there were extensive mine belts across the entire valley. The Rapido lay in the center of No Man's Land, and marked perhaps, the dividing line for patrol activity. For a long while the Americans were dug in on the forward slope of Trocchio near the base, and were willing to watch the Germans on the other side of the river and keep them away from any mischief on the friendly side. The Germans were pretty well content to remain on Monastery Hill and Mt. Cairo and watch the Americans in the valley below. They felt safe behind the river and their minefields, but they realized that

they could never relax their vigilance too much, or the Americans might attempt to cross the Rapido in strength.

So the Rapido became a patrol landmark for over a month, as both sides would probe both banks with patrols and drop an occasional star shell flare over the river to trap any patrol that might be operating along its banks.

The Americans were depending on dug-in tanks for artillery in their forward area, and the tanks would fire either direct or indirect fire on the German positions. There was a constant duel in the valley between the tanks behind Trocchio and the German 88s in their concealed positions behind Cairo. Eventually the valley took on the appearance of hot asphalt as the scars grew across the valley until there was hardly a foot of space that had not felt the impact of artillery. The earth turned to a cluster of brown mud holes and the fields became pitted with craters.

Cassino was in a state of stalemate and neither side seemed to be able to do anything about it. The German patrols would pass through the American patrols and sometimes they would meet and there would be casualties. Other times they would pass unnoticed, and the German patrols would get behind Mt. Trocchio down Highway 48, and sometimes the American patrols would get almost into Cassino.

The Americans reasoned that if they could get tanks across the Rapido they could support some of their patrols, and get into the town itself. The Rapido was not very deep. If its depth were only two or three feet less, it would be no obstacle at all for the American tanks.

There was a stone revetment that kept the Rapido in its course, for after a heavy rain, the waters would rise as the swift mountain streams drained the area, until it threatened to flood the valley. The Italians had lime rock walls on both sides so that the water could rise and be retained within the walls.

The tankers and the engineers were talking. If the tankers could get a foot or so of bottom in the river, and find a way of going over the walls, they could get their artillery on the other side. The engineers thought that they could blow the walls into the river which would solve both problems simultaneously.

Lieutenant Munson went up one day to take a look. An Infantry sergeant led him through the outpost lines. When they reached the Rapido at Highway Six and were working out some rapid calculations, a machine gun opened up on them from the other side of the river. There was only one thing to do and they did it. They dove head first into the icy water and went down to escape the machine gun as it played into the water above them. They half swam, half floated downstream where the river bent back into the American lines. Then they struggled up the bank into the brisk wind, and made their way back to the Infantry line across the snow.

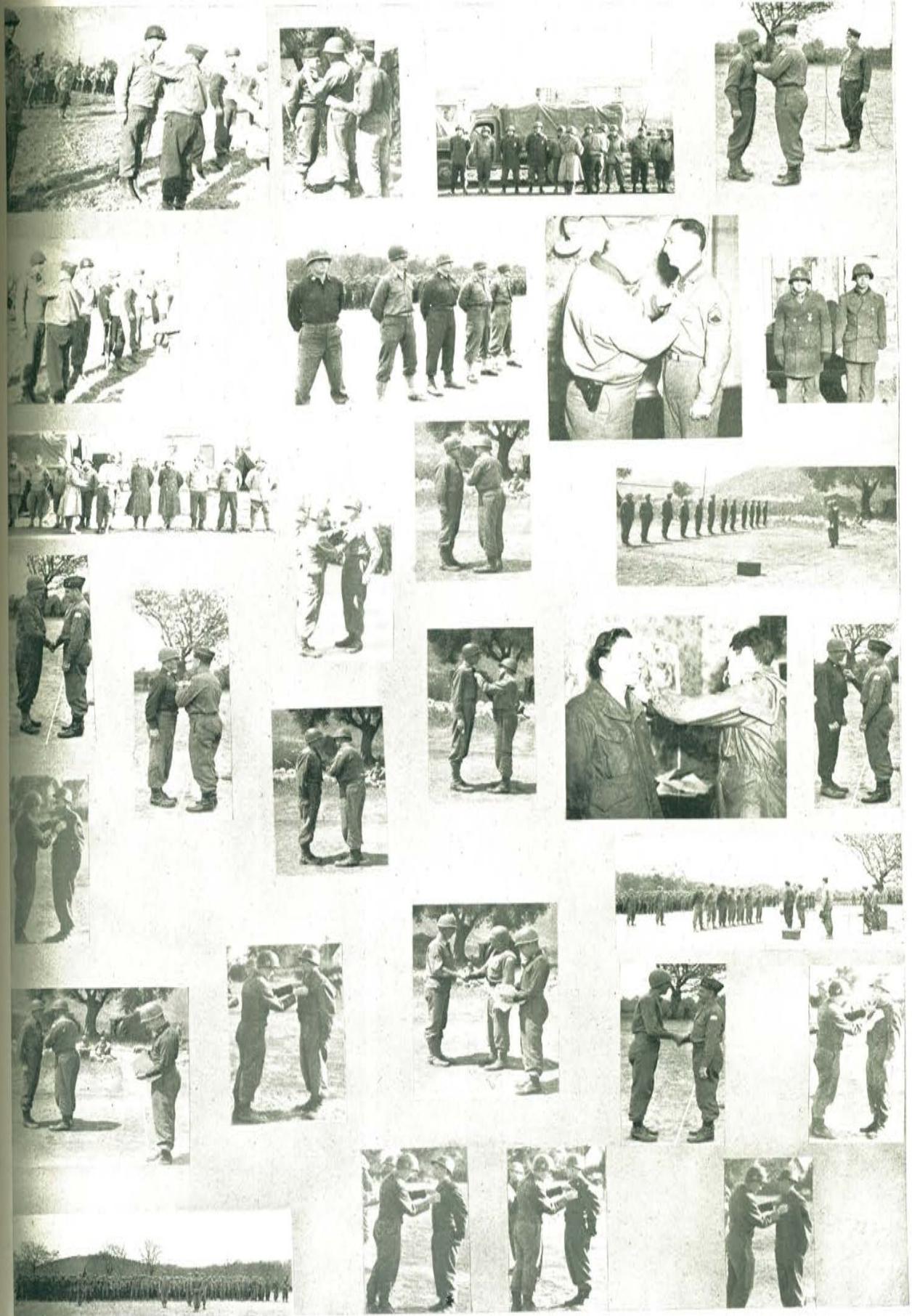
Lieutenant Munson reported that the walls could be blown. He thought that he could do it with one squad. They could pass through the Infantry and move to the site. Then they could work quietly and prepare the charges. At a signal, they would blow the walls and the tankers could run a couple of tanks across supported by Infantry.

The second squad of the first platoon of Able Company was chosen for the job, and they schooled themselves in the landmarks of the terrain that they would follow. The TNT was moved to within two hundred yards of the site at night, and then the following night, the men moved up. They had barely reached the spot when a flare raced upward and burst. Everyone froze, but the Germans saw them. There was an instant chatter of machine guns as the men raced for cover. Then the mortars opened up and the men moved back. They had made too much noise that night. They would have to try again.

The second night, the men had dropped into the water, and were prepared to carry their charges to the other side, when the same thing happened.

The third night, Lieutenant Munson had arranged for Infantry support. A patrol would cross ahead and outpost the site while the engineers made trips back and forth through the icy water with the TNT.

The men slipped into the water and swam across with their loads of explosive. Then they dug holes and tamped the large charges into the bank. The leads were brought back to the near shore, and the squad brought up the rest of the explosives. The charges were buried and the squad retreated



to a safe distance. They moved a long distance down the road, and then twisted the detonator. A huge flash sent rock and gravel racing upward, as the walls bounced into the water. Instantly every gun in the German Army zeroed in on the spot, for the Rapido was a sore spot. Everything from mortars to 240mm banged away at the site as the squad scuttled down the road.

Pfc. Spears, on returning to the company, was questioned as to how he had felt while doing this job. This job had been his first combat assignment as well as for Pvt. Arter, Pvt. Shepard and Pvt. Arcure. They had just recently come in as replacements. Spears said, "We were wondering what was going to happen next. I wanted to stay near "Doc" Boye, because he was a medic. Lt. Munson was laughing and saying, "This will surprise the hell out of the Jerries." That pepped me up. The moment finally came when we set the charge off. The enemy threw everything at us. I had to go back with the lieutenant to see what kind of a job we had done. Lt. Munson said, "It is a swell job, well done."

Meanwhile, the 753rd Tank Battalion were in readiness behind Mt. Trocchio. Captain Schowalter, our operations officer and Colonel Goodpaster were waiting for word from Able Company. Just then the Germans threw in a concentrated barrage. A piece of shrapnel pierced Colonel Goodpaster in the right shoulder and disabled him so that he was never to return to command the 48th again.

When Able Company brought word back that the tankers could now cross, the tankers told them that they would not cross that night as things were too disrupted by the shelling. It was too hot to attempt it.

It was a couple of nights later when Major McCarthy, the new commanding officer of the 48th, instructed Lieutenant Munson to report to Company C of the 753rd Tank Battalion and lead them to where Munson had blown the walls of the Rapido.

It wasn't until midnight when they found the tankers who were nervously waiting for them. Sgt. Stern and Pvt. Coutz volunteered to go ahead of the tankers. As they were making their way towards the Rapido they met a platoon of the 100th Infantry which had been given the mission of outposting the site where the tanks were to cross.

As the tanks attempted to make the crossing the Jerries must have had the site zeroed in for everything opened up at them. The tanks succeeded in backing out. But they had taken a beating. There were small gaping holes in the side of the tanks and the shrapnel had loosened much of the metal riveted on the tanks, for it was hanging loose. The tanks driving back up Highway Six could be heard for miles and the Germans kept walking shells up and down the highway, trying to search out the tanks.

When Able Company inspected the site to see why the tanks had not succeeded, they found that the shells that had landed directly on the site, had cut the side towards the Jerries straight away forming an almost perfect tank trap.



THE CERVARO ROAD

During the long cold days of January and February, all three companies were assigned work on a frontline axial supply route which was unaffectionately called the "Cervaro Road." Where it began and where it eventually did end, only heaven and the records knew, but the tortuous mountain path was headed in that general direction. When the company would be given a road maintenance assignment on a cold January day, the men would mumble a few freezing curses in the direction of Cervaro. The steady rain during the month left the road in the same condition over night, no matter how much work was done during the day. At best, the road was a little better than a two-way mule trail.

Every day, the 48th trucks would pass the same sights. By the end of February, the men knew every twist and turn along the route. They could measure the exact distance between San Vittore and San Pietro in yards or steps or shovelfuls of gravel. The men knew the exact location of every gun in the valley. They knew where the ack-ack was concealed and where the TDs were hidden at the roadside. Every artillery piece was an old friend, and the men would look at the guns a couple of times a week to see if they were still there or if they had been hit.

The artillery seemed to pay a special tribute to the 48th, for every time the trucks passed, it seemed that all of the roadside guns would lay in a simultaneous barrage on the town of Cassino or ring the monastery with fire. The men would curse and swear at the serenade, but the guns would be forgotten when the truck hit the next bump in the road. The heat of their profanity would be turned on the bump in the road and the truck driver would be accused of hitting it on purpose. He obviously knew it was there, for he had been over the road a thousand times.

Then the company stretch of road would come into view; the same stretch of road that seemed to get no better or no worse no matter how much work was done on it. Sometimes in the morning, there would be a new crater in the center of the road. It would be in the same spot the next day, for the Germans did not change their guns often, either. Every day would bring the same tasks.

The drainage ditch would have to be cleaned out again, for during the night in the blackout driving, a truck was sure to go off the shoulder and block up the ditch with mud and gravel. Then the revetment would have to be repaired for the next night; a careless driver would probably ruin that, too. The mud would have to be scraped off the road and some gravel spread over the spot.

Likely as not, all the work was done in the rain. It was irritating rain, that dripped gently down the back of our helmets and sent cold chills racing down our spines. Then there were puddles that would soak our socks and make us miserable. Our army raincoats were good for three hours, and then we may as well have taken them off, for the water would pass right through them and chill us.

Somewhere down the line in a dried river bed, the gravel pit would be working full blast, and the gravel would be loaded into the trucks. Occasionally the shovel would break, and then we would go to the pit and load gravel by hand. These times were welcomed, for this broke the monotony of road maintenance.

We made the "Cervaro Road" into some sort of a game in which we always lost, but it made the gravel spilling just a little less irritating. There was always a sense of competition between the platoons. A sergeant or lieutenant would always be yelling, "Let's go men, the third platoon loaded 43 loads yesterday, let's see if we can make it 45 today?" So we would all pitch in and try to load



Path of Destruction

45 loads of gravel just for our officer. Life was just one shovelful of gravel after another, and one truck after another. We didn't count time by the hours or by days, but by truckloads of gravel on "Cervaro Road."

Sometimes there were little funny things that happened, but it was hard to laugh. We were sick of it all. But we did stop work long enough to watch what was happening.

One time almost all the gravel had been used, so a TNT charge was planted to blow out some more. After a half hour, the hole was dug and the demolition was set. As soon as the leads were brought down we scattered, yelling, "Fire in the hole". Suddenly around the bend in the road, came ten truckloads of French soldiers. We quickly flagged them to a stop and told them to take cover. But no manner of pleading, explaining, or gestures in sign language could make them understand about the blast.

There was about fifty pounds of TNT in the hole, so it amounted to quite a big noise when it went off. We divided our attention between watching the rocks sail upward and watching the French dive from the trucks to the dirt. It was the greatest exhibition of speed we had ever seen.

One day we were having chow along the route to the gravel pit when a sheep came racing down the dried river bed. We cheered it on but wondered why in the world it was running so fast. We did not have long to wait, for a strapping bearded French soldier followed only a few yards behind brandishing a murderous looking dagger. We could all see that it was only a matter of time when the poor sheep would be the loser of the race. They passed out of sight down the path, and a few minutes later the Frenchman returned dragging the still form of the animal behind him. On his face, behind ten days growth of beard, was a look of triumph and a grin that threatened to split his face in two. A lot of French Infantry had a hot dinner of mutton that night.

The "Cervaro Road" was an international place. There were African Ghoums, Sikhs, Indian Ghurkas, British, French, New Zealanders and Americans. The road seemed to be an endless stream of vehicles of all nationalities. Everyone had the same goal in mind -- that shining white monastery on the top of the mountain.

The Sikhs were perhaps the most picturesque of all. They were dressed in dark, somber uniforms with a towel as their headdress. Their prized possession was a long curved knife that was always in their belts. They were good soldiers. They would come walking or marching down the road with their faces grim and determined. Rumor had it that their idea of fun, was to slip up on the sleeping Germans and slit their throats. Their knives were not supposed to be replaced in their belts once they were drawn, without letting blood. They would often prick their own fingers when the knives were drawn accidentally, before replacing them.

The Ghoums were strange soldiers too. They would pass smiling by in their long flowing robes. The robes were in all colors and sizes and no two seemed to be alike. Their wives go everywhere except into battle with them. The women are always close by, when the men are relieved from the lines.

Sometimes the road took on a tragic note for the men of the 48th. There was one sharp turn, where the Germans had complete observation on every truck as it went by the corner. On February 15th, a truck driven by T/5 Pedro was carrying men who had gone to church back to their work sites. They were proceeding slowly because the road was in bad condition approaching "Hells Corner." The crowded men in the truck heard the shrill scream of an incoming shell and waited. They could do nothing. The shell hit a few feet in front of the truck and showered everyone with shrapnel. Pedro pulled the truck to the side of the road and everyone tried to pile out. Then another shell whistled in before the men could move and landed in the center of the crowded men. There were eight casualties.



Ghost Town



Getting a Mouthful



Cleaning Up

Pedro had managed to get out of the cab, and without a second glance he raced to the side of the road, where men had bailed out of a jeep. He appropriated the jeep and raced down the road, heedless of the shellfire that followed him. He found an ambulance along the road, and led it to the spot where the truck was waiting on the corner. He helped the wounded into the ambulance, and then realized for the first time, that he had been wounded in the hand.

Day after day, the road would drag into the horrible monotony of the valley. We were constantly on the same stretch of road in the same dirty weather. However, occasionally, the sky would clear and the sun would come out for a brief instant. The times when the sun would break out of hiding was an automatic ticket for us to watch an air show from our elevated positions on the hill across from the monastery.

The first warning was a sort of dull droning that ever increased in tempo until the mountain would vibrate with the sound. The planes would come in high and small against the clear sky. They were shiny little spots of silver in the blue. They would move to the right of the Abbey, and then nose over in an ear-splitting drone. They would come down with their machine guns spitting steel until their target was centered, and then "Bombs Away". Small, tiny objects would detach themselves from the plane and hurtle towards the Abbey. Seconds later there would be a flash, a puff of ugly black smoke, before the loud crash would thunder across to us. Then the smoke would clear away, and the Abbey would stand clear for the second plane to dive. Again and again the planes would swoop low, drop their loads and be gone. Sometimes a patch of smoke would appear in close to the trail of one of the planes, signifying that one German gunner, at least, had worked up enough nerve to crawl out of his foxhole and fire before he hurriedly retreated again.

We often wondered as we watched the show, why Jerry did not shoot at us more often. We were in plain sight of the Germans, up high, directly across from the monastery. We thought that perhaps he would study our faces through his glasses, and see our expressions. If he did, he must have nodded his head and ordered his artillery to shoot other places. Perhaps, in his generosity, he thought the 48th was having entirely too much trouble on the road without the added discomfort of dodging his artillery.

The Germans had probably met a common agreement. The "Cervaro Road" was an ally of theirs.

The Germans used to take advantage of the small breaks in the weather to send quick fighter sweeps down over the valley. The Luftwaffe would sail down the valley, loop over Porchia and Lungo, and dip down to strafe vehicles on Highway 48 or Highway 6. It was a frequent occurrence and the men were getting quite used to the quick target practice a diving plane afforded.

During one of those rare moments when the sun was lighting the valley brilliantly, Able Company took advantage of the sunlight to relax for a moment and take the dampness out of their pup tents. There were planes in the air, but Able Company did not give the faint drone of aircraft a second thought. The German planes slipped over the mountain to the rear of Able Company and raced for the flat land of the valley with a British Spitfire on their tails. The planes were over and gone in a flash but Able Company was tense after this incident. A few seconds later motors were heard in the distance again, and soon the men saw five Messerschmidts moving high over the valley.

American ack-ack, British Bofors, and 50 caliber machine guns opened up on the planes as though controlled by one trigger.

Lieutenant Finnegan and Sergeant Barker of Able Company raced to their half track, and swung the .50 caliber and the .30 caliber machine guns into position.

There was a crackling roar as the two men opened up on the planes and their bullets mingled with the millions of others that were converging on the five aircraft. One plane disappeared smoking over the hill, and another swept upward and the pilot bailed out. The other three flashed by and were gone.

Suddenly Lt. Finnegan saw a movement high up in the air. He swung his gun up and around and nervously fired for several seconds. The tracers arched upward, and a few seconds later a crow crumpled its wings and plunged for the valley.

Some say that Lt. Finnegan shot the crow and some say he didn't. Some say he did it on purpose and some say he was nervous. The final verdict remained a lasting argument in the company.

The tankers continued to fool around with the idea that if they could get tanks across the Rapido, they could cause a great deal of damage. Elements of Able Company had dynamited the walls of the embankment, but the tankers did not like the idea. They reasoned that if they could have a corduroy road leading to the river, and if bundles were dumped into the narrow stream, it would form a passage long enough and good enough to get their tanks across the stream.

Now was a good time for an attack, for if the American tanks could cross the Rapido to the left of Highway 48, they could drive the Germans across to Highway Six, where the French had hacked out a salient up the "Cervaro Road."

Colonel Goodpaster and Lt. Carter took off on a recon of the stream bed of the Rapido in broad daylight to search for a spot suitable for a tank crossing. The course they followed took them to the right of Cassino. Lt. Carter said, "I expected to step on a mine at any moment or get blasted out by artillery or even run into some Germans, but the colonel kept pressing on making notes on the route

Will it Hold?



Difalco Hard at Work





T/5 Mull and Dozer



Pappy Gordon Takes a Break

we had taken." When they returned from the recon, Colonel Goodpaster contacted the tank commander and told him the tanks could get to the Rapido and across. The Tank Commander was skeptical at first and wanted to know why the colonel was so sure. Colonel Goodpaster snapped, "Because I have just covered every foot of the ground!" That convinced the tank commander and he prepared to move out.

All of the engineer units in the valley were enlisted in the corduroy crossing. The 19th, the 235th, and the 109th as well as the 48th were to prepare bundles of corduroy and divide the road between them. The road was to be built in a hurry, and then the last trucks would dump their loads in the Rapido, and the tanks would roll across the river on a road of wooden bundles.

Charlie Company of the 48th was chosen for the job, and began to prepare bundles of corduroy until there were many truckloads ready. It had been raining, and as usual, the valley was flooded. There were from eight to ten inches of water and mud on the ground, and Charlie Company waded out into the mud with their first bundles. Then as the road grew during the early hours of the night, the engineer trucks would cross out on it and drop off their bundles at the end.

The Infantry was on one side of Charlie Company and the Germans were on the other, but for some reason, the Germans did not fire. They were probably taken by surprise and could not afford to give their positions away until they saw what was developing.

Twice the Germans sent patrols. Once there was a patrol on the left, and another on the right of Charlie Company, but they were both driven off by the Infantry. Apparently, the Germans could not stand the suspense of what was happening out in front any longer. At first they sent a few exploring shells, which developed into a barrage. The shells were landing in the soft mud and showering the men. But the ground was so soft, that the shells did not explode.

One of the shells did explode near Pvt. George Walsh, and he was severely wounded, but most of the shells would go skimming across the ground, or bury themselves with a big splash.

Along the route were several tanks that had been knocked out before on a previous attempt, and Charlie Company piled their corduroy around them and passed them by.

Near daylight, the task was finished. The 19th dashed up to the river and threw in a double thickness of the corduroy bundles. Seven tanks made the trip across and attacked the German positions, from the unexpected left flank. The Germans were surprised and retreated to the right, enabling the French forces with their new salient on the "Cervaro Road" to capture more than six hundred prisoners.

The idea was a novel experiment, and as far as we know it was never tried again at Cassino.



MONTE CASSINO ABBEY

By Courtesy of *YANK, the Army Weekly*, and Pvt. George Aaron

Cassino has been dimmed somewhat by the passing of time and the detailed reports of other great battles like St. Lo and Bastogne, but it will never be dimmed in the minds of the American troops that fought there.

The dreary valley leading to the stark white monastery remains as clear to most of us as it was during those months of January, February, March, April, and May. Cassino was the focal point of the world news then, for it seemed to us that the American Army consisted of the 3rd, the 34th, the 36th, and the 45th Divisions. One division would relieve another with horrible monotony, and each would launch an attack down across Purple Heart Valley, only to be driven back in frustration. It seemed like there was only one engineer outfit too -- the 48th. For no matter who was holding the line, and where they would go, the 48th would still be in Mignano, San Vittore and Knox Avenue.

The lack of rest and the pitifully small American Army in Italy had us all down. We sat in the snow and mud and shivered while we wondered whatever happened to the millions of men in England who were going to make a "Second Front."

There were too many comfortable pictures of home, and the people were somehow not able to comprehend the terrific hardships that the American soldiers were going through that winter.

But we laughed and joked and froze and cursed and dug our trucks and tents into the good earth that kept us warm at night and protected us during the day.

We wrote endlessly and tried to think of things to say. We didn't write to let people know how we were making out but just for the break in the dull monotony of the valley that a letter from home would bring. We harried the mail clerk until the letters were distributed and then sat and wondered and worried if we weren't among the lucky ones.

But the valley brought us all closer together and helped to make us a working team. During the long dull hours we would talk about anything. Everyone knew everyone else's girl or wife and what he did, and the fun he had back in the Bronx or St. Louis or Terra Haute.

We found buddies and huddled around a candle or a gasoline stove and talked about what we used to do or what we were going to do or what we ought to do...or just griped about whatever happened to be the current injustice lately.

Or we would lie in our blankets and listen to the shells and the tanks moving up and back and the wind and the snow.

The freezing mornings were the worst. We would lie in bed and wonder whether it was worth while getting up for the powdered eggs and cereal that would be cold by the time we found a sheltered place to eat.

Our one happy day was the Christmas turkey; but everyone had the stomach cramps the next night.

We couldn't win and we couldn't get out of that enclosure of mountains and we couldn't get warm and we couldn't stand this army another month or we'd go bats.

We were tired, sore, cold, and low. Everyone was arguing about what the soldier was fighting for and did he know. But we were so disgusted that we didn't care if we knew.

There was always that dazzling white building on the top of that grey hill. Every morning it was there. It preyed on our minds and sunk low into our spirits. It would rain or it would snow or it would be clear and cold and sloppy underfoot. But the building was always there. Even when it was covered by the haze of snow or battle smoke, we could look at the hill and see it, even if we couldn't see the hill at all.

There were three hills in the valley, Trocchio, Lungo, and Porchia, with Highway 6 going up one side and Highway 48 on the other. At the bottom was Mignano and at the top, the Rapido River and that damned mountain. That was our map. We didn't need any other. Any of us knew how to find the railroad station or Knox Avenue, or Horseshoe Bend or Purple Heart Valley. We could tell it in yards, feet, or miles. In the East were mountains, in the West were mountains, and we and three mountains in the middle. Three mountains, two Highways, and three battered towns, Mignano, San Vittore and San Pietro -- miles of shell holes and stinking brown mud and the 48th Engineers.

When we got too disgusted with thinking we would go to Maria's or Angelina's over in the shattered town of Mignano and drink some rotten vino.



The Citadel

Or maybe we might get a pass to Caserta, not thirty miles away, where people wore campaign ribbons with stars on them, and there were movies and signorinas and vino.

But that is all we could do, unless we wanted to lose a month's pay in a poker game or read Special Service books to find out who murdered some guy.

At night we could listen to the guns and figure "that one went out, and that one came in." Sometimes we didn't have to figure. One barrage lifted the H & S officers' tent into the trees and hit every office in the CP. Another one plastered Able Company's area from right to left.

But most of the time, it was just one or two guys, that got hit. Nothing sensational, just one or two guys, or maybe three or four a week. Every three weeks the replacement truck would drive up and ten or twelve clean soldiers would get out and mingle nervously among the dirty ones.

Some of the men of the 48th got hit doing something big like taking Mt. Porchia or bridging the Rapido, and in the next month's newspapers, there would be headlines. But most of the men got hurt blasting rock, or sweeping roads or filling some sloppy hole with a shovelful of mud. There wasn't anything glorious about the way they got hurt.

But the replacements would come in and we would wonder who that guy was for a couple of days and then get plastered with him some night and find out that he was all right and he had a lot to worry about, too.

We wondered about the cigarette rations and whether we would have cold stew or hash for chow, and why we didn't have anything else, and about who was up for rotation and what happened to the mail that wasn't coming in, and if the next attack would take the town, and why they didn't outflank it, and when would the "SECOND FRONT" come and LORD, would it ever be over.

Cassino was a real war.

CHAPTER XI

"MEN"

The valley was a strange place during the winter months. A man had to be an expert on the valley and understand every landmark to get around the roads and mountains without sooner or later bumping into a German patrol or blundering into the German lines.

There were places where the Germans would never shell like Highway Six below Mignano, and places where every vehicle would draw fire from a hidden German gun like "Hells Corner" on the Cervaro Road. There were places where there were lots of mines, and other places where it was safe to walk.

In many places the Germans were sensitive, like the end of the railroad where it crossed the Rapido, but American patrols could move up and down the banks of the Rapido further down without drawing fire. The Cassino Valley from Mignano to the Monastery was one landmark after another and there was an SOP as to how they should be crossed. There were certain days when the Germans would shell and certain days when the front would be quiet, still, and cold.

Captain Van Campen first thought of the idea. His junior officers were enthusiastic when they heard it.

The captain said that as long as the 48th was going to have so many strange little jobs in the valley, that a special team should be taught just about everything there was to be known about warfare, and that they should do all of the forward reconnaissance. He reasoned that a small group of highly skilled men could accomplish their mission far better than a large patrol.

These men would have to be hand picked volunteers. Each would have to be absolutely fearless. They would not have any other work to do except hazardous reconnaissance work when it was necessary.

A number of men were interviewed, but Captain Van Campen finally decided that five men were best. He chose Sergeant McCall, and Privates Weller, Haynie, Williams, and Beal. These men had the reputation in the company of being unusually cool under trying circumstances, and there were many action stories about them circulating through the outfit. Captain Van Campen told these men that there were no ratings open, and spared no words explaining how hazardous their job would be. He ended by making it known that there would be no reflection on a man if he did not wish to join now that the facts were known to him.

Sergeant McCall had done all of the drafting for the railroad. He would set up his transit in the open while Corporal Hanson or Private Bulsa would hold his Philadelphia rod. McCall, after each recon, was to collect all the information and enter it on an overlay for S-2.

All five men were then placed under the leadership of Lieutenant Phelan, and then the recon team began training immediately. Private Williams was used as the driver. The men spent long hours under the leadership of Captain Busch, studying American and German mines. A rifle range was located near the side of a mountain, and the men would fire all day with all types of weapons. They experimented with the bazookas until each man became a skilled marksman.

The Communication Section under Sergeant Womble, taught the men radio, and how to report and use all types of army radios. There were long sessions in map reading and coordinates and fire. They



studied combat in towns, and the men were taught how to pass from house to house, and move around corners with the smallest part of their bodies offering a target for snipers.

The recon team was getting to know the valley, and they were constantly out on hazardous missions. They didn't hesitate on any job, and the men were gaining the respect and the admiration of both officers and men of the 48th. Leisure hours were their own, and the men who were flirting with death, developed a hungering thirst for vino. Nothing was too good for the recon team, and they had the best of everything. Whenever they wanted time off, it was granted. In fact if they did not ask for enough time off, the officers from S-2 and S-3 would go out of their way to suggest it. The men would have to have plenty of leisure time to steady their nerves from the constant fire. Actually, the five men chosen thrived on close calls, and they were anxious to be up at the front. Often when there was no reason to be prowling around the front lines, some of the team would take off just to look for excitement.

A tank attack was scheduled and the 48th was asked to find a tank route that would allow the tanks to pass from the upper end of Highway 48. The 48th had aerial photographs and maps of the area, and the Operations Section studied them, and found a small trail that would be suitable for a road running in the right direction.

Most of the road was in No Man's Land far up on the front, so the recon team was told to get the dope on it. Haynie, Beal and Weller started out to the front. The men reached the lower end of the trail and left their jeep. They checked the map, and looked for the spot. They walked through the open fields within sight of the Germans and searched the ground for the road. Eventually, they came to a ploughed field with a small path going through the center towards the German lines three hundred yards away. The team sat down and reoriented their map. Surely, this was not the trail that showed on the map. It was only a foot wide. They checked and rechecked, and finally decided that the trail was the one they were to find.

When the team reported to headquarters, that the tank road was a cowpath that ran through a ploughed field, the planning officers were stumped. They went over the maps again and again. Each one of the team was questioned. Absolutely, there was no other path around. They knew, for they had walked up and down through No Man's Land for an hour looking for the road that looked so nice on the map.

There was no other road anything like it up there. Never-the-less the planning officers thought the team was wrong. So up the recon men went again, this time with Lieutenant Phelan, and repeated the performance in front of the lines. There was just no other path. That tiny route was the road that the tankers wanted to use.

They had walked boldly up and down right in front of the surprised Germans during broad daylight and had not drawn so much as a rifle shot. When they returned to their jeep, however, and turned on the motor, a barrage began to fall.

The team had been asked to locate an aid station bivouac, so they started back down the road to look for one behind a small rise in the ground. When they came around the knoll, they saw a small house that would serve the Medics excellently.

Just as they were pulling up their jeep in front of the house for a closer inspection, they heard the high-pitched whine of a large calibre shell. The shell droned on as the men scrambled from the jeep. Suddenly the whole house disappeared in an awful roar. The men were showered with stone and wood as a cloud of smoke rolled over them. Then they brushed themselves off, threw several large rocks out of the jeep, and decided that the house would not do. They had to find another.

Such was the work of the recon team. It soon became an efficient deadly little outfit, that was as closely-knit as a team could be.

They fought and played together, and regardless of rank, they were buddies and friends. The men were experts in death. They could handle any weapon and had the nerve and the confidence to try anything.

When a drunken French soldier started shooting his tommy gun from a truck near the CP buildings, Private Beal walked right up to the truck and took the gun away from him, although the glassey-eyed

Frenchman was waving the gun around and literally spraying the ground with bullets. Beal was not touched.

Haynie and Weller were over in a cave one night trading with an Italian family for vino. They had bought three bottles and started back when they heard the whistle of a shell. They hit the ground as the shell hit a cliff above their heads and sprayed them with dirt and rocks. The two men would have to cross down the mountainside and move through the valley, and then up a steep hill to the CP buildings. The valley was a hot spot, for the Germans were continually firing there. The two men sat on the hill and watched the shells break in the valley. They opened a bottle while they waited, and eventually went back to the Italians to drink it while they waited for the barrage to pass.

The bottle slowly disappeared, and the two men picked up their other two bottles and started back to camp. Just as they reached the spot where they had been previously, another shell screamed in and landed close. The two friends hit the dirt, and decided they needed a drink after that one. They lay there and drank the other bottle as they watched the shells come in the valley in groups of three.

Haynie timed the shells as he watched. There were three shells, then an interval of 28 seconds, and then three more. They sat there several minutes and timed the shells as they drank. Each time it was three shells, twenty-eight seconds, and then three more shells. After the second bottle had disappeared, Weller turned to Haynie and suggested that in spite of the shells, they had better get some chow. He suggested that they walk for eighteen seconds, and then spend ten seconds finding cover. After the three shells came in, they could start walking again.

They tried this plan. They walked hurriedly down the hillside, counting off eighteen seconds, and then scrambled into a crater. The three shells came in close, in quick succession. Then the two men hurried out of the hole for eighteen seconds. Soon they were laughing about the German time tables, as they crouched in the craters and listened to the three shells scream by. It did not take long for this routine to change to eighteen seconds and a drink, and then eighteen seconds more and a drink.

Three bottles of vino between two men is a lot of vino, and by the time the men had reached the center of the valley under the eighteen seconds - - and - a - drink plan, they were rather unhappy about scrambling into a crater for a drink. They had began to take the drink in the open, and when the bottle was gone, they could not find any reason for even stopping every eighteen seconds.

So they continued across the valley and up the far hill without bothering about getting into craters every eighteen seconds. The shells continued to come in, and by the time Haynie and Weller reached the CP, they were showered with mud from the exploding shells although neither of them had been hit.



First sergeant is a hard job in the army if a man is really conscientious about his work. The job has no limits. A first sergeant is an arbiter between the officers and the men. He has to know everything that is going on, and should be personally interested in every man in the company. He has records like the Guard Roster, Sick Book and the Morning Report to keep, and must be capable of relieving the company commander of many burdens and make decisions in the absence of company officers.

Able Company's 1st Sgt. Buckley was a rare soldier, and at the same time a gentlemen and undoubtedly the most popular man in Able Company. The men of the company would not hesitate to come to him with their troubles, and he would help them out anyway that he could. He was the real first soldier and would fit into any crowd, yet hold the respect and admiration of every men present.

Sergeant Buckley was not afraid of officers or his job. He gained the trust of every officer in the battalion and had as much a hand in running the company as any officer present.

In basic training, the officers noticed that one particular private stood out among the rest, and he rose rapidly through the ranks, and when the company moved for overseas, he was their topkick.



Sergeant Buckley Receiving The Silver Star.

Sergeant Buckley realized that he had a 24 hour a day job, and he would constantly visit the work sites, and check on the men at their work. He would lend a hand himself, and get right down with the men at their work to learn for himself the problems that his company was meeting.

As a direct result of Sergeant Buckley's influence, Able Company was a happy unit. Every man was proud to be in Able Company and did his job better and faster than he did before.

Morale is a big thing in war. It will make the difference between a job well done and a job muddled. Somehow, when the men work happily, the job is always better. There is a lot of pride in work, and work that is well done is the trade mark of a happy company.

When Able Company went up as Infantry on Mt. Porchia, Sergeant Buckley ran up against his first obstacle as a combat leader. Before the men had reached the mountain, Buckley had gone up and down the line of men time and again in hopes to bolster their courage and morale. He constantly urged all the men to trust in God and everything would be all right. He always managed to be at the head of the column when the going was tough. Finally, though severely wounded, Sergeant Buckley had to be ordered to leave the company for medical attention.

Upon returning from the hospital Sergeant Buckley continued to work unselfishly for the benefits of others and constantly visited the men on their work sites.

One day, while returning from delivering a message to the forward elements of his company, Sergeant Buckley was caught in an enemy artillery barrage. The jeep was riddled and a small fragment of shrapnel pierced his throat. Sergeant Buckley died in a forward aid station.

The men heard that he had died when they returned from work that night and many couldn't believe it. Many of the men failed to go to supper that night, while others remained awake late that night, because they realized that they had lost a real friend. They remembered then that nothing used to please the sergeant more than if he could notify some weary soldier in the middle of a cold black night that he had just been chosen to attend some rest-center for the next five days. There was no errand too long, no condition too trying, or no good deed too minor that wouldn't merit his personal attention.

On two occasions the sergeant gave up his rest period so that someone else, beaten and tired, could go instead. When a man went to the hospital, the job of taking care of his personal belongings, which is the squad sergeant's job, was taken over by Sergeant Buckley. He spent many hours gathering personal belongings and taking care of the articles that belonged to the man.

Yes, every problem had an answer, every will had a way, nothing was impossible. He was never known to swear, never once became excited, yet always present, always driving, always striving to do something for someone else, and never expecting a favor in return.

Sergeant Buckley was a true Christian Soldier and died as such, known by all who knew him as the real first soldier.

It was long after pay-day but the men of Able Company managed to gather 400 dollars for Sergeant Buckley's wife and baby yet to be born. The men of Able Company could do no more.

Rumors began to spread through the companies that a big all-out attack was going to start against the enemy bastion of Cassino any day now. Gradually, most of the tired American troops had left the Cassino Valley, and the 48th along with a lot of other supporting troops were attached to the Second New Zealand Corps. The New Zealanders moved in with strange looking lorries and tiny little tracked Bren carriers. There were a lot of troops in the valley now and they were all fresh. It looked like the Germans up on top of their mountain were going to really take a mauling. The artillery in all sizes moved in, and the big guns were set silently and secretly all along the valley. Whatever was coming up was going to be really big.

We were pretty sure that if something was going to happen in the valley, the 48th was to be in it. If they were going to get into Cassino, they would have to cross the Rapido, and that was an engineer job. We reasoned that this automatically was the task of the 48th. It would be a tough one, but if the mountain could be taken, most of us were pretty willing to risk it.

The officers and headquarters personnel watched the guns and the strange equipment roll in. We were building up supplies for some sort of a big operation, and the headquarters men put their heads together.



There was no word as yet about anything, but the 48th had a sort of foregone conclusion, that there would shortly be big things in the valley, and that the 48th would be right in the middle of things when they happened.

Then, suddenly, in a 1108th Engineer Group field order, the whole plan broke. Five hundred airplanes were to circle the monastery in the morning and bomb it. Then at another hour, the thousands of guns in the valley would open up and saturate the entire mountain. Then Able Company was to rush to the Rapido and push a Bailey Bridge across. Baker Company was to hurry across the bridge and clear mines from the extensive field on the other side into Cassino. Charlie Company was to stick with the tanks and get them across, and get them out of the way when they were hit so that other tanks could take their place.

The companies began preparation for their jobs. There were hundreds of other little jobs to be done. Able Company realized that they might need a lot of corduroy to get their bridge trucks to the site, and they began to make corduroy bundles. Baker Company held long sessions in mines, and checked and rechecked their mine detectors. Extra mine detectors were sent to them. Charlie Company went over their equipment, for they would have to work fast to move the big tanks around. They needed everything for their job, for they were not sure what they would meet. They prepared their pioneer tools, for the tanks might get mired, and they built up a stockpile of corduroy to make a hasty road in case it was necessary.

There were all sorts of codes to be studied, and the radio operators in each company went over their assignments again and again. The radios were checked and made ready for use.

But then the weather turned against the Allies. It rained and the ground got soggy. The airplanes could not get through the cover, so the attack was delayed. It was temporarily set for the next night, but it rained again, and the tanks bogged down. The tanks were moved out on high ground, but it rained again. Day after day it rained, bringing with it the same stereotyped message from Group, "Attack delayed for another 24 hours." The companies would be notified, and they would turn in or nervously inspect their equipment for another time.

On the night of the 14th of March, the men at headquarters learned that the air force weather forecasters predicted that the storm would break. It might happen tomorrow. The airplanes would have to take off from a soggy field, and they might have trouble getting off the tarmac with their heavy bomb loads, but they would risk it if the sun came up in the morning. The tankers looked at their muddy vehicles and reasoned that the going would be tough, but the American tanks would be able to crawl through the fields.

The Infantry spent the night quietly and hoped. It was getting too long now. They had been under the strain too long. They wanted to attack and hoped for a break in the weather. If it had to come they would just as soon get it all over with. It would be worth it, for the American papers had been criticizing the Fifth Army and the forces in Italy, and everyone was generally sore because the Germans had held the hill for so long.

The 48th inspected its bridge train, tried the motors, tested the trucks, looked to its equipment for the hundredth time and waited.

In the night word came that the attack would begin in the morning of the fifteenth of March.



THE TALE OF THE TWIN BRIDGES

The word flashed from headquarters to headquarters up and down the valley as messengers raced with the sealed orders that "Dickens is on tonight."

In the cold placid light of early morning, the droning began. It rumbled louder and louder until the whole valley rocked with the vibration. Out of the clear sky in the south they came... high above the mountains. There were groups of 36 B-25 medium bombers in the squadrons with tiny pursuit planes etching vapor trails high above them. They droned on in close formation over the heads of the waiting anxious men in the mud below.

Five hundred of them droned relentlessly above the valley and moved towards the shining white monastery on the mountain top.

Then their bellies opened and black specks hurtled downward. The first bombs sent geysers of white and black smoke rolling upward from the hill, and then the echo of the sound crossed to us like the amplified burst of a burp pistol. Another flight moved in as the first flight made its bombing run and turned to move away. The geysers of white and black tumbled higher and rolled out above the hillside and more and more bombs landed on the mountainside and the monastery.

Three sullen little puffs of black smoke trailed each flight of bombers as they made their turn. There were three, and then three again as the Germans opened up with three ack-ack guns. At first the puffs were low, and then they climbed higher, until one plane took a puff in close on the tail.

But the planes droned relentlessly on. It was all very businesslike as the squadrons flew over the mountain. After the medium bombers, came the flying fortresses with larger loads of bombs. Each flight would move down the line and then make their turn. Shortly after the smoke would climb higher, and then the splattering explosion would echo down to us.

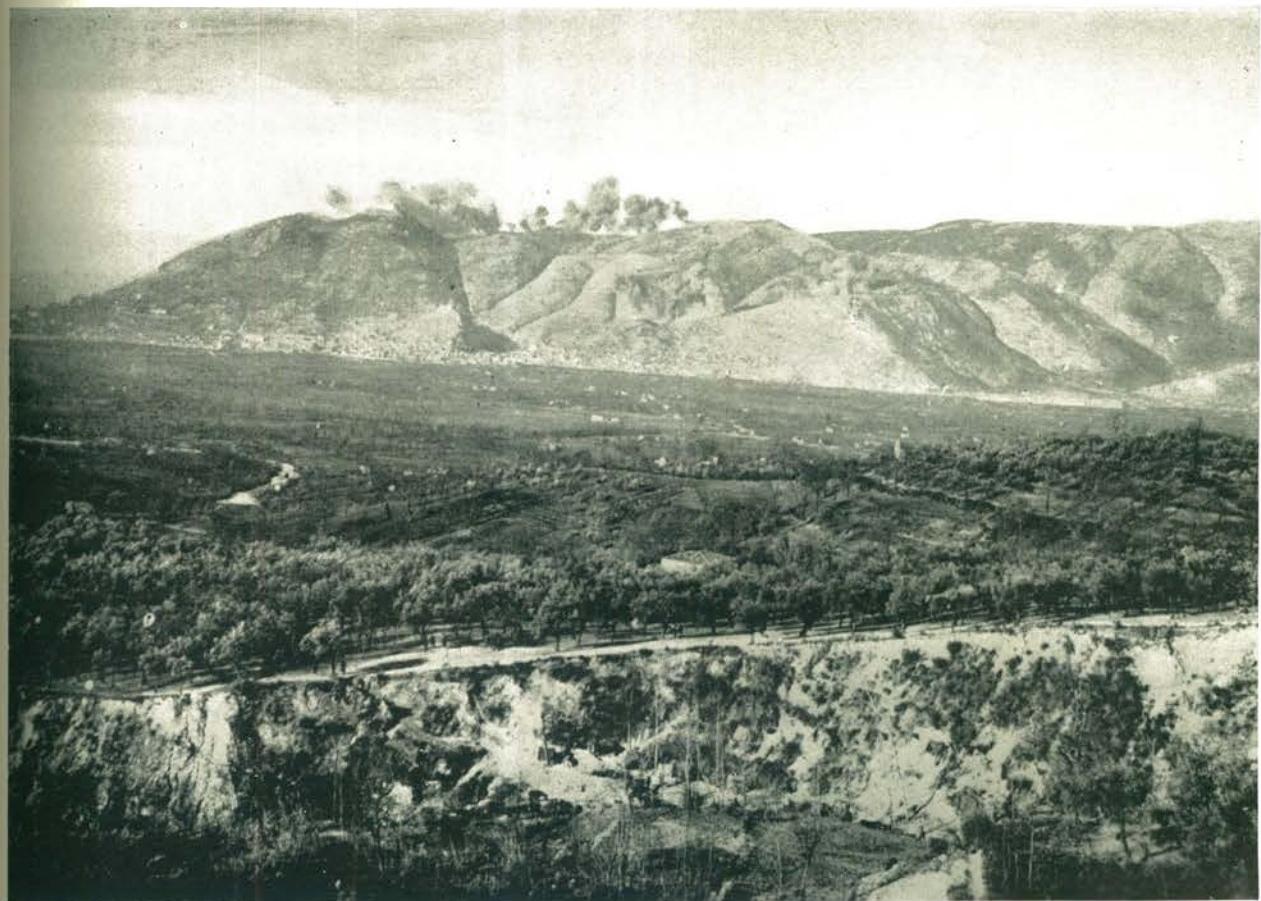
But suddenly the bombs were no longer falling on Cassino. They began to fall all over. One flight dropped them near the CP buildings at Mignano far over near the mountains, and there were sudden explosions from the gully to the left. High up on the Cervaro Road to Venafro, the Americans and British were taking a beating. All of their equipment for the big push had been brought up close to the piles of ammunition and their gun positions.

Pfc. Minch, who was with a squad from Baker Company maintaining an aerial beacon near Venafro relates the following: "The time 1000 hours. I was frying my eggs when the first bombs hit Venafro. Taking the pan off the fire, I watched the bombs land in the city and half way up the mountain. The next forts dropped their loads on the mountain, bottom and top. The next bombs landed between Venafro and the Piper Cub Field. This field was 150 yards away from our tent. A colonel from this field ran to us and asked how fast we could change the Z to a V to point to Cassino and how long it would take to light it. In thirty-five seconds it was completed. The 36 forts that were over us, dropped theirs. I could see and feel the concussion when they hit the field. Eleven Cubs took off and were in the air just in time. One plane did not go to flight; its pilot was ordered to leave it on the field so the forts could tell it was an American plane in American territory. Bombs landed on both sides of the road from Venafro to Campana where American, French, Indian, British and New Zealand troops had their bivouac areas. The closest bomb was 150 feet from our tent. All during the raid an Italian

girl stood, on a high bank hollering, "Momma mia". I could see the forts over St. Marie. The bombs landed in the town and in the valley between there and Venafro. About this time, Paul Reamond, Elmer House and I took off for the middle of the valley away from Venafro. Everyone on Highway 7 and in Venafro had the same idea. Another 36 forts flew over our heads. We tried to run from under them; the suspense of waiting for the whistling bombs was enough to drive us crazy. None were dropped. We came back to camp at 1330, and found our tent still up and the V still burning. The farm girl was still screaming 'Momma mia'."

A number of planes from the Air Corps had missed their targets and had bombed friendly territory, but many of the 500 planes had accomplished their missions. The monastery, which was the German OP and Cassino itself was practically pulverized. At 1400, the signal was given. Every gun in the valley resounded from mountain to mountain. Eight inch Naval guns, 90mm ack-ack, French 75s, and Italian railroad guns thundered into Cassino. The shells rocked the mountainside, and Montecassino glowed as the shelling caused multi-colored lights to flicker on and off about the entire mountain. Cassino had never witnessed such a demonstration of artillery. The shells walked up and down the mountainside and the entire valley was lit up as every artillery piece for miles around was zeroed in on the mountain.

The plan for the attack was a bold one. The moment the artillery barrage opened, the Second New Zealand Division began a full scale attack from the north to mop up the enemy positions in Cassino. Their mission was to establish a bridgehead around the southern limits of the town. Under cover of darkness, the 4th Indian Division was to seize and secure the high ground to the east of Cassino. At the same time, the 78th British Division was to demonstrate against St. Angelo, but was not to launch a full scale attack.



Bombs Bursting on Montecassino



The Rapido, and



Montecassino Behind

The 48th's mission simply read, "To provide a crossing over the Rapido River at Highway 6 and to open the route through Cassino for the passage of tanks." On the completion of our bridge, Combat Command Baker of the First Armored Division was to make a lightning thrust through the Cassino bridgehead and exploit the Liri Valley to the west and southwest.

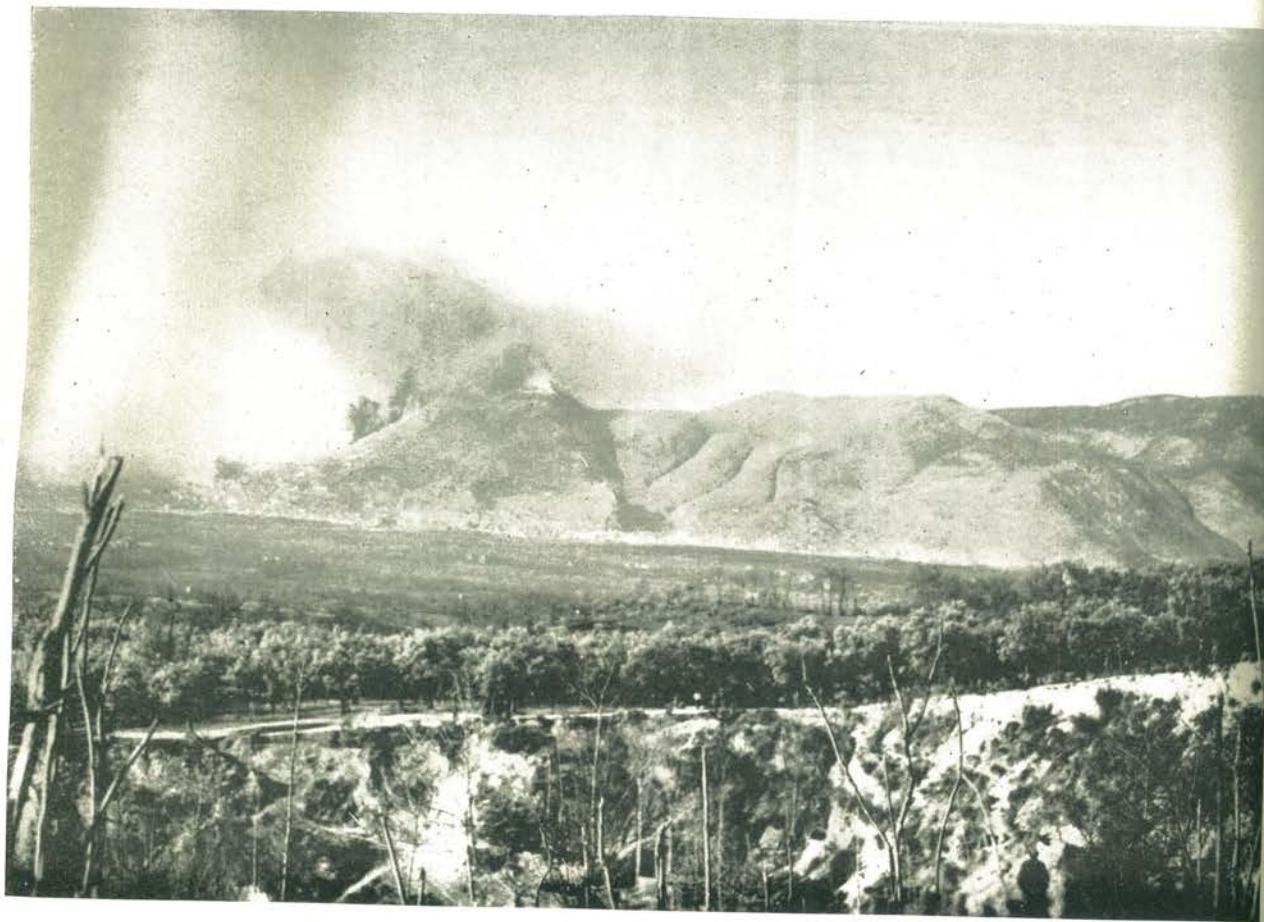
All watches were synchronized with the New Zealand Corps' time. The night before the attack the Communication Section had wired our forward CP with Supply, the Medics, and the cemetery where Able Company would assemble. Also, wire was laid to the bridgesite. Captain Schowalter's instructions were to lay wire on both sides of the road so that if the shelling knocked out one side the other side might still be intact.

Under cover of darkness, the 48th's bridge trains began to move slowly up. The drivers' eyes were gradually becoming used to the darkness. A shell landed close by and knocked out one of Able Company's trucks. Five men were wounded; two of them, Sergeant Manikko and Pfc. Pohja were so badly wounded that they never returned to the outfit. At the German cemetery, the trucks turned left and followed the Tank Road, which provided a defilade down to the assembly area near the Italian cemetery. Following closely was the 534th AAA trucks that were to safeguard the bridge from air attacks the moment it was in. Then came the trucks carrying men and ammo for the many tanks and guns that were dispersed in the valley waiting for the bridge. Our corduroy and gravel trucks were joined by ten trucks from the 235th Engineers that were filled with gravel to be used on the by-pass on the proposed treadway bridge. The ever growing convoy had swelled to an enormous proportion. It seemed that all vehicles were headed for the Tank Road. The Tank Road was in the spotlight. Everything was now in readiness.

Along the Tank Road, there were two small rooms in a lone house. One room was being shared with the New Zealanders and was the joint CP of the 1108th Engineer Group and the 48th Engineers. Colonel McCarthy, Captain Foley, Captain Bowsher, Captain Flowers and other rank of the 1108th Engineer Group were sprawled on the floor. Colonel Clark of the 235th Engineers, was there to give whatever assistance was possible. From the 48th Engineers, there was Captain Van Campen, Lieutenant Phelan and the liaison officers from the respective line companies. Lieutenant Schubert of the 534th AAA was also present. The rank was lightly jesting, reading by candlelight or munching on a K ration when Colonel Swift walked in. Colonel Swift had just flown over from the states to take over the command of the 48th. It was his first day here and he was faced with the mission of building two bridges across the Rapido in front of Cassino. This was no easy task even for a colonel that had been long in combat. Colonel Swift had not had the opportunity to meet most of his officers so an introduction followed:

The Twin Bridgesites





Fire on the Mountain

At 1940, Captain Schowalter hurriedly came into the CP carrying a message from Major Currie. "Send Sammy's Boys when light is right." This was a predetermined signal for us to get immediately into operation. Things began to bustle, Corporal Mallen was on the switch board and he quickly relayed the message, "Send Sammy's Boys when light is right." Mallen repeated this message to the Supply and the Medics. We were all tense, the moment had come at last. The drivers along the road were in their cabs when the word was whispered from one to another, "Send Sammy's Boys when light is right." The motors were turned over, the bridge train started slowly and soon the great convoy was underway. But up ahead something was wrong. There was great concern. Why did they not keep rolling? The drivers in the rear wondered what was happening ahead.

Their only answer was a man running along the Tank Road towards the CP. Breathlessly, Captain Munson entered the CP. His eyes, for a moment, were dazed by the candle light. He looked around. Then Colonel Swift blared out, "What in the world is wrong?" Captain Munson replied, as he tried to catch his breath, "One of our bombers dropped a bomb and it has hit the forward end of the Tank Road. There is a 70 foot gap through which water is running." Earlier that day, Able Company had reconnoitered the road. They had gone almost to the end of the Tank Road when the Germans spotted them and threw in a mortar barrage that had finally forced them to withdraw. They had reasoned that the Tank Road was passable, for only the day before they had seen the forward end.

Colonel Swift thought for a moment, and then ordered Munson to immediately start getting his bridge train back to Highway Six and down to the bridge site. The big trouble was to get past the other vehicles on the Tank Road which was but one way. In addition, Captain Munson was to leave a crew to gap the bomb crater with treadway. The captain hurried out to carry out these orders. At the same time, Captain Foley left for the New Zealand Corps Headquarters to inform them of this new development.

Captain Schowalter, then spoke to the colonel. He thought it best that we did not commit the treadway on the Tank Road for the time being. The treadway would be urgently needed for the alternate bridge that was to be built next to the Bailey. The colonel listened thoughtfully. Yes, Schowalter was right, so he sent orders down that the Tank Road was not to be bridged. In the meanwhile, Captain Munson was very busy. The Tank Road was a narrow, well defiladed road that had two very high banks that gave unusual protection. But to turn the vehicles around on it, even in the daylight, would be practically impossible. Yet on this night, when you could not see four inches ahead vehicle after vehicle had to be cleared off and the bridge train had to be turned around. This took two full hours. Would Able Company have the time to get the bridge in before daylight? Colonel Swift, greatly concerned, went out to check how everything was progressing along the Tank Road. He was dressed like an enlisted man and did not have his rank showing. He came across Lieutenant Finnegan, who had never before met the colonel, blurted out, "Will you get out of here so I can get the work done?"

At the same time, the bridge train was moving slowly down Highway Six, a small German patrol was cautiously making its way across the Rapido to the left of Highway Six and then headed towards the highway to see what was underway. When the New Zealand Infantry outposts caught sight of them, they opened up with their machine guns. The enemy patrol returned the fire, and then quickly fled.

It wasn't until midnight that the bridge train reached the bridgesite. The enemy must have had a premonition that something was underway for they kept walking shells up and down Highway Six so that by the time the bridge train had reached the site, three men had been hit by shrapnel.

With time so short Colonel Swift hurriedly decided that he would not wait until the bridge was in before committing Baker Company. Baker Company was then ordered to clear their way into Cassino. Pfc. Yeager said, "We from Baker Company were all prepared. We had stacks and stacks of corduroy ready, mine detectors all set, demolitions prepared, bangalores ready and all trucks ready to haul gravel. We had waited for darkness. It was a dark night but as we rode down Highway Six we saw night turn into day as the shells burst on Monastery Hill, illuminating the surrounding terrain. We pulled into our assembly area, set up our mine detectors and waited. We waited a little over four hours and finally Colonel Swift's orders came for us to proceed down Highway Six towards the Rapido. We received our first shock of the night. The bridge was not in yet; we would have to wade across the icy water. Involuntarily, everyone shuddered. The first element to wade the icy waters was a preliminary recon party consisting of Lieutenant Buckley, Lieutenant Jonah, Corporal Veronda, Corporal Michel, Pfc. Lute, Pfc. Savala, Pfc. Karlovich, Pfc. Howe and Private Murphy. The river at that point was partially filled with rubble so it was about knee deep of gushing water. With this advance party was some New Zealand Infantry, but they did not want to lead this recon party into Cassino. As the party went along the road looking for barbed wire entanglements, the Infantry followed. The road was filled with bomb craters and the barbed wire entanglements were torn up making the going most difficult. They moved slowly and cautiously until they finally reached the crossroads. Heavy machine gun fire cracked the air. A pitched battle was going on just ahead. From the sound of it, they reasoned that the Infantry was finding it plenty tough to gain control of the mountain. They lay in a shell hole for awhile and then slowly made their way back to the Rapido where the mine clearing detail had already started sweeping and probing for mines. The mine clearing work was progressing satisfactorily. They finally reached "peach". Each crossroad had been designated by a code word and as each one was reached, headquarters had to be notified. "We were then passing a number of blown trees, obviously used as a road block. With the limbs hanging everywhere, it made sweeping extremely difficult. However, by probing carefully, we checked all the spots and then moved right into Cassino. It was a ghost town; there was not a building standing anywhere -- just broken hulks looming out in the pre-dawn darkness. We experienced a strange sensation walking into this bitterly contested town, but we could not get far because directly in front of us was a bomb crater of gigantic proportions. Two trucks could have easily been buried in it. It was useless to go any further for the debris and earth was on the road almost two feet in depth. We turned off our mine detectors, retraced our steps and went back just as dawn was breaking."



After the Battle

During the time that Baker Company was clearing the way into Cassino, Able Company was struggling against time to complete the Bailey Bridge. Colonel Swift had previously told Able Company to concentrate all its efforts on bridging the Rapido. He had requested that the 235th Engineers bridge the Tank Road. It was several nights later while bridging this Tank Road, that the 235th Engineers had nine men killed and forty-three wounded. A barrage had landed in the center of the working party.

There was a gentle drizzle that made working uncomfortable and the men at the bridge site could see the flashes of the shells as they came whizzing over their heads. Private Raphael, who had recently joined the outfit, heard for the first time, a nebelwerfer shell as it came screaming in. He quickly scrambled for cover and jumped into a bomb crater and almost drowned before the men could pull him out. He lost his rifle and his helmet. Fortunately, the shells would flop into the soft mud and sink in so that there was not too much shrapnel effect. Before the work could begin on the bridge, two trucks and one jeep had to be rolled out of the way. About ten to fifteen dead soldiers had to be moved to the roadside. Corporal Schrab stooped over to pick up a gunny sack with panel pins. Instead, he found that he was fingering a dead Ghoul. Then small arms tracers, which Lieutenant Finnegan thought were from a Mauser, came whizzing over their heads. But work still progressed in dead earnest. The men started to whisper for panels. The panel crew was not to be found, for the truck had been knocked out by shell fire on its way down Highway Six. Beside their own jobs, the men had to pitch in and do the job of the panel crew as well. Then came another bit of disheartening news, instead of 70 feet of Bailey Bridge, 90 feet would be needed. Several of our own bombs had increased the width of the gap. It was now a fight against time. The men knew that the bridge had to be in before daylight for to be caught in front of Cassino at dawn would be no less than suicide.

The men were hard at work when Colonel Swift came to the site and stood silently watching. Sergeant Goetz saw him. He, too, had never met the colonel before. He came over to the colonel and in an authoritative tone said, "If your detail isn't working, get out of the way."

When work first started everyone was quiet and cautious. At every sound the men would whisper, "Quiet, don't make any noise." A hard rubber hammer was used to pound in the panel pins. But after an hour, a sledge hammer was substituted for time was at a premium. The noise would resound so that the men were jittery, expecting at any moment a concentrated barrage on the site. The sound of the big guns must have drowned out the noise of the hammer. Then every so often the Germans would drop two or three flares down near the bridge site. You could see the sweat on the men's faces and the rain dripping from their helmets as the men froze. Just at 0505, as first light was creeping in, the colonel sent this message to the New Zealand Corps, "Bridge completed." Colonel Hanson, Corps Engineer Officer, knew only too well what those two words implied. He sent a message back to Colonel Swift, "Will you convey my congratulations to all ranks who worked on the task last night?"

But Cassino was not yet ours. The Second New Zealand, the 4th Indian, and the 78th British Divisions supported by all the armor of Combat Command Baker had not as yet succeeded in taking Cassino and the high ground to the west. The Germans had clung tenaciously and had contested every inch of the ground.

At 0915 on the second day of the attack, the Indians started to storm the monastery. At 1122, German planes swooped down on the bridge but the 534th AAA was waiting. The crew bailed out as a plane went down in flames. While the men were eating chow at noon-time, twelve Jerry planes came towards the bridge but the 534th AAA again warded them off.

At 1430, Captain Foley, who was in the Operations Section of Group, phoned that the bridge was still intact. A few tanks had crossed and were going towards Cassino. He ordered our companies to stand by in readiness. At 1600, the Germans attempted to knock out the bridge by lobbing mortar shells into it. Private Kron was wounded during this barrage. The bridge was the thorn in the German's side. When the barrage cleared up, the bridge was still in. In the meantime, we were busy preparing for the building of a twin bridge across the Rapido. Lieutenant Hollar, who went out to check if the bridge was still in, decided that he would make his way into Cassino. The whole valley was screened with smoke. While looking around in Cassino, he came face to face with General Mark Clark, who asked him who had built the bridge across the Rapido River. What seemed to trouble the General most was that he could not locate the Infantry in Cassino.

The quarry at the Horseshoe Bend was to operate throughout the night. The 235th Engineers had loaned us three bulldozers and with six of ours, we were ready to clear away the ruins of Cassino and open the route for the tanks into the Liri Valley. But at 1905, a message arrived. "The Infantry is not doing as well as was expected. Remain in alerted status."



This Was Cassino

That night, Graham Hovey of the International News Service happened to be with our Charlie Company. He was taken up to Cassino by Captain Mark Reardon and his jeep driver, Corporal Earl Hall. Hovey writes, "I walked down Highway Six to hell tonight." Hovey tells the story how he, Hall, and Captain Reardon rode a jeep to the Bailey Bridge on the way to Cassino. Then they walked in the darkness where death lurked in every shadow or came with a screaming German shell.

Hovey said, "I looked around. We seemed to be in some kind of a square. There seemed to be one fairly intact building on the left and nothing but occasional white walls anywhere else. The bulk of Mount Cassino loomed up, it seemed only a few yards off."

"A few tanks and a handful of soldiers were standing guard as stretcher bearers labored through the rubble with their burdens."

"We waded through plaster and mud to a cavelike hole. I almost tripped over the body of a soldier near the entrance. Then we got down on our hands and knees and crawled through a tunnel. My steel helmet scraped the tunnel roof, but I didn't think it was that sound that made shivers run up my spine."

"Finally we stood erect again and by the light of a lantern I saw that we were in the cellar of a ruined building. Wounded men lay all over the place. Most of them were sniper casualties. They smoked and said little or nothing. It's true that wounded men don't cry."

That same night, Pfc. St. Julian and Private Elliot of Able Company were guarding the Bailey Bridge equipment across the Rapido. It was about one o'clock in the morning and the Germans had thrown in an unusual heavy barrage near the equipment, so the two men decided to crawl into a fox hole. They had just about settled in the hole when Lieutenant Snyder drove up, and finding the men in the fox hole he started to chew them out. St. Julian, his teeth chattering and his body shaking all over, just managed to say, "They're --- shelling," when, "Wham," a shell exploded nearby. With arms and legs in motion the lieutenant dove into the hole with the men. The three men huddled in the fox hole and sweated out the heavy barrage that followed. After a let-up in the shelling, Lieutenant Snyder said, "Maybe you better stay put, but keep a sharp lookout."

On the night of March 17th, we were ordered to build the sister bridge, a hundred yards north of the present Bailey Bridge. Baker Company was to construct the bridge. Two layers of double thickness corduroy were laid, to make vehicular traffic to the site possible. At about 0330 in the morning, Baker Company blew two walls at the site so as to make construction possible. To divert the enemy's attention, a heavy artillery barrage was to open up at the same time. But this was snafued for the timing of the explosion and barrage was not synchronized. As a result, shelling was persistent around the site. Work however, progressed until first light at which time Colonel Swift ordered everyone back.

Next evening, Baker Company continued to work on the approaches and at 2400 hours Able Company began construction. The site was being shelled by heavy artillery. A number of the shells fell into the Rapido River; the banks gave some protection to the men. A little past midnight, Lieutenant O'Leary and Sergeant Schreiner were wounded by shrapnel and were evacuated immediately. The whole atmosphere was electrified with a tenseness and expectancy of something forboding. Captain Munson in aligning the bridge, kept whispering to his men in a fatherly tone, "Now men, all together, push -- a little more, a little more." Despite the shelling the men responded with all they had. Every few minutes the Germans would shoot a flare overhead. The men would freeze; you could see a cold grimness in their faces. The flare dimmed; we began again. Colonel McCarthy, then commanding officer of the 1108th Engineer Combat Group, came with Colonel Swift to the site. After taking to the ground several times, he was more than willing to give his approval to move the men back. In spite of everything the Bailey Bridge had been put across the Rapido River that night. It was now 0330, the moon had come out making observation by the enemy possible. Stringers, chest and ribands still had to be put on. This was accomplished in very short order, early the following evening.

To recall to your mind the actual magnitude of the job accomplished under as difficult combat conditions as possible--here is what the count revealed on the second Bailey Bridge. Ninety loads of gravel and 355 rolls of corduroy had been used on the 280 yards of road approaches to the bridge. One 36 foot culvert was completed on the near side and two 14 foot culverts on the far side.

This was the Tale of the Twin Bridges that opened the way to the very heart of Cassino itself.

Twin Bridges

E LEHMANN 45



A delicious rumor floated around the tired companies' areas. The 48th was going back for a rest. For a long while after the March 15th attack, there was nothing that could make us feel good. We had given our last ounce of strength and will to put our hearts into the last big fight to get out of the valley, and we had failed.

Through the ranks there was a sense of despair. We had tried everything we had, but it had not been enough. We were licked in the valley, and we knew it.

But the rumor heartened us. Rest would be a wonderful thing. If only we could get out of these mountains that were closing in on us... if only, for a few days we could get away from this feeling that the next night would bring the shells screaming into our bivouacs.

Private Gromalski heard the rumor and was happy. He was so happy that he started over to Mignano for a bottle of wine to celebrate. He bought the bottle and was returning to his area to find his buddies so that everyone could celebrate the fact that we were leaving the mountains and the sea of mud.

He was crossing the area when a shell came in. He was dead before his buddies could get him to the aid station.

On March 24th, at 0330, the 48th left the Cassino Valley and convoyed to Airola. In all, the 48th Engineers had been at Cassino for 104 days with the exception of two days when we pulled back to Ceprani after the Infantry assault on Mt. Porchia. During this time we had lost almost all of our top commanders. Colonel Goodpaster, Major Fullerton, Executive Officer, Captain Van Campen, Battalion Engineer, and many of the other officers had been hospitalized. During the 48th's stay in the valley, the 48th had four commanders: Colonel Goodpaster, Major Winger, Colonel McCarthy and finally Colonel Swift.

But the day we left the valley, it was the same as it had ever been. At 1245, enemy bombers hit the second Bailey Bridge that we had constructed over the Rapido before Cassino. At 1800, enemy aircraft flew low over the bivouac area and H&S Company opened fire with the machine guns mounted on their trucks.

Even as the trucks gathered speed through the night and we hurried away from the valley we worried about the shells. We did not consider ourselves safe until we were a long way from the valley. Our first combat assignment had been given us on the 16th of October, ten days after we landed in Italy, and we were a tired lot. The 104 days at Cassino had been almost a little too much.



REST, SNAKES, AND TRAMWAYS

Airola was a small town tucked between towering mountains far from the war and excitement of the valley. It was spring when we moved and the days were getting warmer and longer. The valley was sunny and the rainy season had passed. The men of the 48th settled down into a hard-earned rest period of relaxation.

There was a training schedule, but everyone agreed it was just enough to make us remember that we were still in the army. There were twenty percent passes to Caserta every day, and a lot of men went to nearby Benevento.

Every night there was a session at "Pittsburgh Joe's" across the dusty road from our bivouac area. Joe had worked in America for the National Biscuit Company in Pittsburgh, and he was anxious to exchange views with his former neighbors.

Joe sold good wine, and his customers were many. His house was conveniently located to the men of the 48th, and his ample cellar was filled with enough to supply the needs of the thirsty engineers. His house became a popular meeting place in the town.

There was an Italian theatre in town, and although it played American movies several times a week, a lot of us went in to see an Italian show. We were amazed to see our American film stars apparently letting go with some pretty good Italian. We kept watching the actors' faces contort when the talking stopped, and we got a kick out of the sudden hurried burst of speech as an actor flashed across the screen in the process of drinking a cup of coffee.

Charlie Company stayed in the Cassino Valley for a few days with the tankers, and then joined the rest of us in Airola in time for a big parade. General Keyes presented medals and decorations won during our stay in Cassino, and told the men, "The more individual awards a unit receives, the better over all, the unit becomes." The 48th had become well-known in the valley, and the combat troops of Cassino respected the hard-bitten engineers of the 48th. Highway 48, the attack on Montecassino, and Mt. Porchia were subject of many tales that passed through to the United States from the soldiers and from the correspondents in the valley.

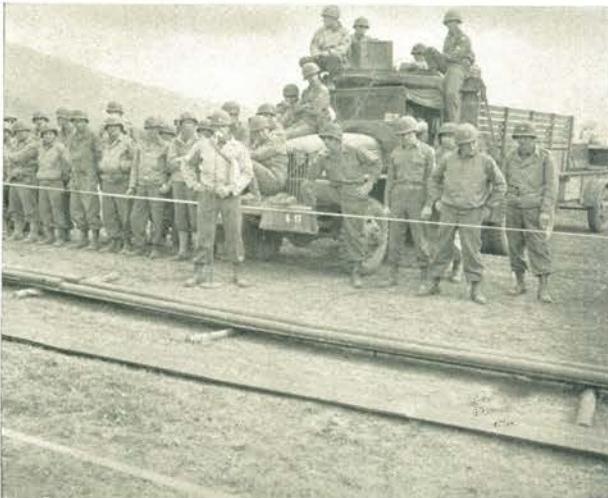
On the 10th of April the Battalion moved from Airola to the vicinity of Mt. Massico on the western coast of Italy in the Minturno sector. We pitched pup tents under cover of trees near the small town of Selice. It was a sleepy place, and the men were beginning to like the idea of staying behind the lines. There were more passes, and a volley ball league was started. The 48th was playing and they were beginning to enjoy life again.

While at Selice, the 48th was assigned experiments with new engineer equipment. Charlie Company picked up a load of rippled steel plates that amazed them at first. Then they began to tie the plates together according to the manual of the new M-2 Snake.

Meanwhile Baker Company began work on an Aerial Tramway up the side of the towering Mt. Massico.

Able Company began to pound out a jeep trail up the rocky side of the mountain further along the ridge.

A demonstration of the new equipment was planned for the 1st of May, and the companies rushed through the latter half of April to perfect and experiment with the new equipment.



Colonel Swift, and . . .



The Snake

A demonstration field was picked just outside of the town of Selice, and the Snake was hauled to the area. The first M-2 Snake to arrive in the European Theatre of Operations was an item of much curiosity among the engineer officers, and on the 1st of May, more than four hundred officers, which included three generals, had gathered in the area at Selice to witness the demonstration.

When the Snake was detonated, a long path was blown across the minefield. Mines as far as fifteen feet from the path were detonated. Then the tank rode through the gap to prove that the Snake had detonated all of the mines.

An anti-personnel minefield was laid, and the men of the 48th demonstrated the use of primacord attached to a rifle grenade. The explosive primacord was shot across the field with a rifle grenade and then it was detonated. The explosive force made a discernible path across the field which enabled the probers to quickly clear a path.

The officers gathered about the great length of the crater of the Snake and asked questions of the men who had worked on the primacord.

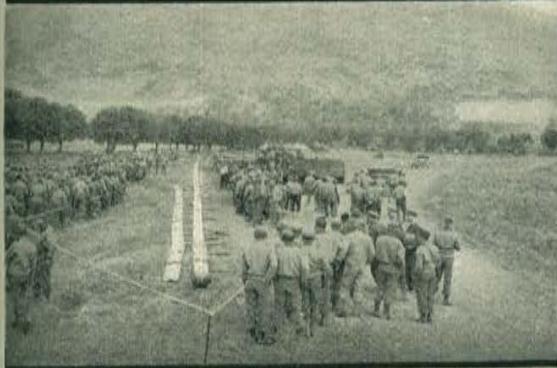
Colonel Swift rode on a weapons' carrier which had been fitted with an amplifying system by the Communications Section, and narrated the experiments and explained the equipment as the demonstration progressed.

After the Snake and the Primacord demonstrations, the officers moved a few hundred yards down the road to the site of the Aerial Tramway.

It was during the early part of our rest and training period that Baker Company first received a shipment of gigantic boxes with the strange label "Aerial Tramway". Although everyone tried to guess what it was no one seemed to know. Some said it was a new type bridge, others claimed it was a treadway for an airport, and still others believed it was a new transportation device. But as yet it was just rumors and wishful thinking. Then presently it was unveiled; it was a new device to bring supplies up through mountainous country and bring the wounded down. It was built along the lines of a ski-lift. We didn't, at that time, know all the headaches, and backaches we would experience with it; all we knew at that time, that here was something new and interesting. There were absolutely no notes on it and all the flaws were to be worked out by the 48th. There were some blueprints from the manufacturer, but nothing else. We were to make the official test overseas on rough terrain.

The next day the crates were ripped open on the field in front of our bivouac area. The pieces were taken out of the boxes, and we began to assemble it. It reminded us of a giant jig-saw puzzle, pieces that didn't fit one place would be taken off and tried somewhere else. That day, we assembled it and tore it down just to get the feel of it and to get a little acquainted with its construction.

Then a few days later official construction began on Mt. Massico. To assist us in carrying up the parts was a platoon of Italian Alpine troops with their mules.



THE SNAKE
AT
SELICE





The Snake Goes Up



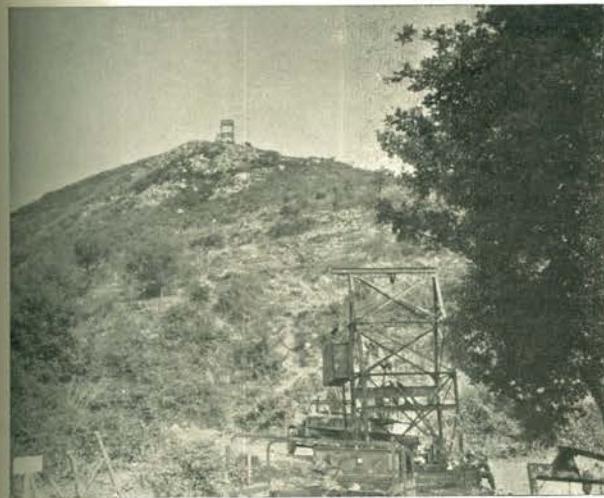
Final Proof

When we first got there we just stood for a moment and gazed in wonder at the immense mountain they had picked for this try-out. Then the work commenced. The first step was to level off a spot for the towers. It was a fairly simple job at the bottom but as we got into the mountain itself we found it was practically all solid rock and necessitated blasting. So as promptly as the TNT arrived charges were set and blown. Even then most of the work had to be done by the gruelling hand method. Picks and sledges were used to literally beat a smooth spot in the mountain for the first tower, and there were two others to contend with. Next came the transportation difficulties. The tramway parts were not heavy but they were clumsy, and it was a job tying them on the mules. There were parts that could be transported by one mule and there were big parts that could only be transported by two mules could not work in close harmony, and they would buck and try to shed the parts. So they would have to be unloaded and two other mules selected. Then there were cases of lost equipment coming up and all hours of the day men would be seen traveling the length and breadth of the mountain looking for a lost bolt.

We began to suspect at this time, that this was going to be a very troublesome job.

The construction of the towers, offered some problem, too. When we constructed it before, it was on level ground and with the use of ropes, raised it up. But here on the mountainside there were no level spots or smooth places. What had to be used here was manpower and manpower alone. All day and all night long the constant call of "Lay hold, heave it up," could be heard drifting across the countryside. At the end of the first day muscles were sore from lifting, and legs aching from constantly traversing the mountain.

The biggest headache, though, was the cables. There were four cables; two were of a certain size, and two of another dimension, and they had to be connected to each tower. As the cable was unwound the men would catch hold of it and start up the mountain until finally there were about fifty men climbing with the cable. Up, up, up they went dragging the cable and every step they took the cable grew heavier. Finally with everyone sweating profusely, they reached the last tower, looped it through and began their downward trek. It was a job, but after an hour of steady dragging they reached the bottom. That they thought would be the end of their difficulties with the cables. For the rest of the cables could be brought up by means of this one cable. They were wrong. The following cables became so hopelessly entangled that they had to be detached and the whole torturous process done over again. Cpl. Hanson who was an expert on cable splicing, was called in from the S-3 section to help.



The Towers On Mt Massico



Free Ride



Will It Work?



Convoy



General Keyes



Beats Walking

There were a great many more bottlenecks that had to be ironed out in the Tramway before it could be assembled. There was an endless stream of trouble. Some pieces were not made right, thus trouble was encountered splicing the cables together, and plenty of trouble pounding stakes into almost solid rock. These and many more difficulties stood before us to bar our way to completion. There were countless times when the work was at a standstill and the common thought running through everyone's mind was, "Fort Belvoir didn't try too hard on this one," "Send it back to Belvoir" or "Belvoir couldn't do it themselves so they sent it over here to get rid of it." It was a bunch of mad engineers who lost their sleep over this experiment.

Then the dawn broke through and it was complete. Next came the trial run. But even here we were doomed to have trouble. The cargo carrier was attached, and with the tramway motor racing, it began to ascend. About half way up the mountain we saw it press the cables down and bounce along the ground. The motor was instantly stopped and everyone put their heads together to get a solution to this one. The only solution was to tighten up the cables but even that couldn't be done. For if the cables were tightened up anymore the pull exerted would lift the "dead man" out of the ground. It was finally decided to take the ponderous cargo carrier off and in its place put an improvised cargo carrier made from an oil drum. After it was done, much to our amazement it worked.

Finally after all flaws were taken out, the official exhibition was held. It was a proud day for us, and all the mashed fingers, backaches, and sore muscles were forgotten in the excitement of the exhibition. General Keyes was there to extend his congratulations on a job well done. Then we knew that our work had not been in vain. That in the future those attempting to assemble a tramway would have the fruits of our labor, and so save much manpower and many manhours.

Able Company continued to struggle with the tough jeep trail to the observation post on Mt. Massico. The route wound around the mountain over a torturous mule trail that twisted through the rock to the mountain top. Able Company used Italian mules and Alpine troops to haul their supplies to the top, and struggled with the stubborn mules and the temperamental Italians in a race against time to complete the road. Able Company blasted the rock and worked the bulldozers high on the mountainside. Slowly the trail progressed, and Able Company watched the schedule. The men wondered why they were taking training in trails and whether they would have to build another one again. They knew that there was a reason for their training and they wondered what it was. They guessed that some day in the near future they might have to build a trail, they worked hard and wondered. Charlie Company took a hand in the trail so that they could get a little experience in the rush job.

But the rest period was not all work and training, there were vino parties and passes. Every afternoon, there were ball games, and inter-company volleyball games.



Does The General Dunk 'Em



Every afternoon, a truck from each company left for nearby Speedy Beach, operated by Second Corps, on the shore of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

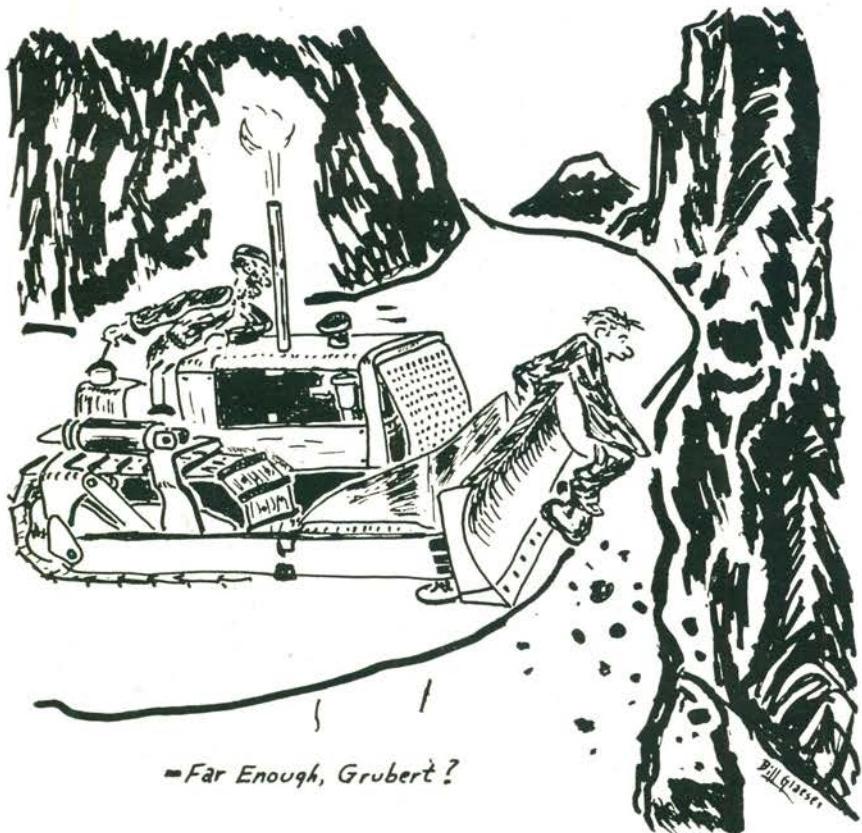
Speedy Beach was a little chunk of home to a lot of the men of the 48th. The bright warm sand and the sparkling blue water of the Tyrrhenian were enough to make most of us forget Cassino and the war for a couple of hours. A few miles up the road, a Bailey Bridge was smoked to conceal it from shellfire, and every now and then a thump of guns would boom across the roar of the surf. But somehow the war seemed a lot further away than a couple of miles up the road.

Somewhere out there was home -- a lot closer now. Soon the push would be on and Jerry would be running and the war would be over.

The loudspeakers droned Benny Goodman and a cheerful chatter came from the volleyball court. Just like home only there were no women on the beach. That is all the place lacked. If there had been women in bright bathing suits, and maybe a couple of guys walking up and down the beach selling hot dogs or newspapers, the spot would have been identical to one at home. But the sand was warm and the water swell, and this was the closest place to home we had found yet.

It was great to lie there and be warm all over and listen to the band and just think and dream.

The 48th was in a new sector now; the Cassino Valley was many miles to the right. But there was a real war here, too. About ten miles from the bivouac site at Selice was the war-torn town of Minturno, and behind it the towering mountains of the German's Winter Line. The Germans held in this sector, too. And in spite of many attacks that carried across the Garigliano River and through the town, the territory of the mountains was still very much disputed, and the Americans had made little or no progress through the winter.



Through the months of March and April, and the early parts of May while the 48th was resting and experimenting behind the lines, the front had remained stabilized. Cassino had held and Minturno was still a hotspot. After the abortive attack of March 15th, when the Allied Armies had thrown together everything at Cassino and it had held, there were no other great operations. The lines settled down to waiting out the winter, while the Fifth Army brought up supplies for the spring. There were rumors at first that later changed to fact, that there were two more divisions in Italy - the 88th and the 85th. The two divisions would work in the Minturno Sector. That meant the 48th would work with them, and we were curious about how the new outfits would stand up. Everything pointed to a real drive during May, and the 48th felt that that they would be in it again shortly.

We missed the 45th, the 3rd, the 36th and the 34th of the Cassino Valley, but we liked the idea of starting a new operation with new divisions. We had grown weary of the stubborn fight in the valley.

On the thirteenth of May, S-2 spent a sleepless night. The section was told to prepare a huge map of the Minturno sector to be used by Colonel Swift at a lecture the following afternoon. The entire section worked through the night, and by almost noon the map was ready.

There was a Battalion review by Colonel Swift, and the men gathered around a movie screen in a near-by field. The map had been placed on the screen, and hung, towering above Colonel Swift.

Colonel Swift first reviewed the history of the 48th for the men and praised them for their fine work in the Cassino Valley. Then he turned to the map, and explained the coming operations. The map showed the two parallel routes, Highways Six, and Seven, that led up two valleys to Rome. The attack would follow the two valleys with the objective as Rome. The 48th would share in the attack in the Minturno Sector, and would shortly move into position. "The mountain jeep trail," the colonel said, "is an indication of some of the work that we will be doing." The colonel thanked the men for the long hours that they had worked to make the demonstration of the Snake and Tramway a success. Based largely on the experiments and conclusions of the 48th Engineers, the Snake was accepted for practical purposes by the army, while the tramway was returned for improvements.

On May eleventh, the big attack pushed off, and the fresh doughboys of the new divisions crossed the Minturno and struggled for a foothold on the German Winter Line. For three days, the mountain barrier held fast, and the bitterly contested ground changed hands many times.

On the Fifteenth of May, the 48th moved to an assembly area a few miles south of Minturno on a flat plain. During the night the entire Battalion was treated to one of the greatest air spectacles we had ever seen. Offshore, a heavily laden convoy was moving towards Anzio with reinforcements and supplies. The convoy was close to shore and was heading up the coast, when German night raiders appeared. Both the anti-aircraft batteries on water, and those on land combined their attack on the raiders, and the sky was filled with blood red dots that moved slowly upward.

Offshore, there was the crunch of bombs, and the sky flared as the searchlights moved across the heavens. Perhaps a ship was burning for the sky was red in the west. It burned dully for hours. More and more raiders took the place of those who had dropped their bombs and left, and the ack-ack converged where the searchlights pointed.

It was a tremendous thing, for the raiders would pass over our heads with the trail of tracers following, and then head out to sea. There would be the frightening sound of an airplane roaring in a dive, the crunch of bombs, and then the white flash or brick red glow of the bomb itself. Meanwhile, the yellowish white fingers of the searchlights would move across the sky, and the lines of red would follow them.

The 48th spent the night watching as the battle moved slowly northward through the night. It was a preview of things to come for the 48th.

THE SPIGNO TRAIL

No sooner had we reached our new bivouac when the tempo was speeded up. Captain Foley left with a mine clearing squad for the vicinity of the mountain town of Spigno to clear an area for a bivouac. At 0115 in the morning, the Battalion moved out. The early morning air was so dampish that odor seemed to cling. Every once in a while we'd go through an area that had the most heavenly scent of lilacs; the next few minutes we'd pass through an area that had the festering, decaying odor of dead men and horses. The towns of Minturno and St. Maria were stinking, crumbled masses.

The first squad, second platoon of Baker Company was proceeding up the road following what they thought was another vehicle out of our convoy, when they were forced practically off the road by another truck coming from the opposite direction. Just as they were making their way back on the road there was a deafening explosion and the truck rocked crazily. They had hit a tellermine. When the smoke cleared away the truck and trailer would never be used again. The men had suffered, too, there were four casualties. One of the men, Pvt. Mendy, never came back to the outfit; the others, suffering from shock mostly, came back in a few days.

The Garigliano was a tiny stream lined with a tangle of blown walls and gutted houses. We swept over a smoked Bailey and plunged into the route of the new advance.

The road into the Winter Line was a mass of vehicles and men as the army moved forward. Miles of vehicles clung hopefully to the mountainsides and waited, while somewhere up the line, there was a traffic jam. Off in the north, there was another line mountains, and friendly artillery at the top of the first newly-won ground was firing sporadically. The shells broke on the far slopes of the second line of the German defense, and now and then the Germans would answer.

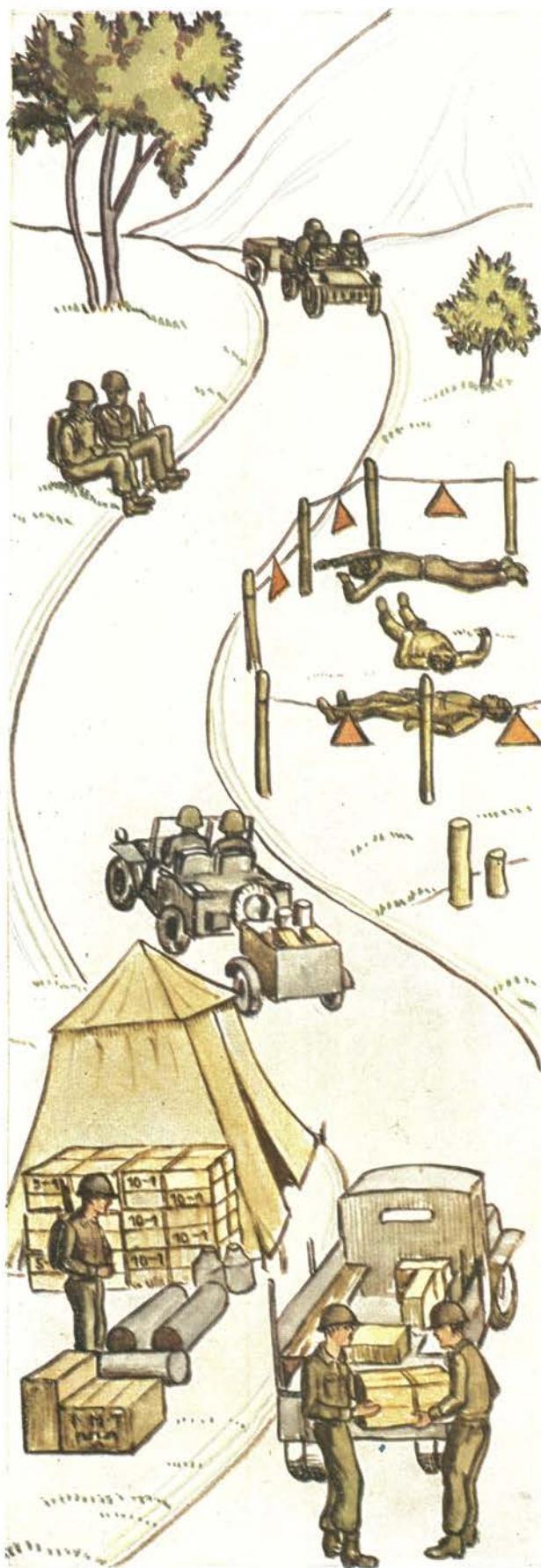
Some of the men that travelled that route during daylight hours could see, along the sides of the roads, new tanks, with their white stars still glistening. They were hardly a month from America but they lay on their sides, or with their guns pointed at crazy angles where they had been knocked out by mines or enemy artillery. The tanks testified to the bitter fighting that had characterized the first days of the new campaign as the green divisions, fresh from the States, assaulted the positions of the much vaunted Winter Line.

There was a forward aid station, rocked by shells, and scarred with shrapnel. Outside stood two or three litters with a trace of dull red. The debris of war was along the road. There were endless little pieces of equipment that the Infantry loses in battle. There were muddy, empty "K" ration cartons and canteens, leggins, and now and then the shattered stock of a rifle. There were combat packs piled high in places where they had not as yet been picked up, and over all, there were clips from Mausers mingled with clips from American M-1s. The ground was riddled with mortar craters and the trees were stripped of their branches. It was a sweet sickening spring day, and the 48th was back in the war again.

The Germans fought hard, and made the advancing Fifth Army pay bitterly for its ground. The new divisions were fighting hard with all the spirit that they had built up through their months of training and they were proving what they had learned in their first action.

The furious battle continued over the mountain chain, and by the third day, the Germans were delaying across the valley. The eager Infantry swept forward from the heights and the artillery moved in to support the fight for the second mountain barrier.





German artillery was answering the batteries, feeling out the strength that the Americans were gathering for the second phase in the battle. Now and then the enemy shells would whistle overhead and break on the slopes of the mountains or disappear back into the Garigliano Valley behind us. Traffic was slowed for a while, as the Germans threw shells at the valley road, but after the barrage lifted, the crowded traffic working to the heights was permitted to filter down the road to the valley network that led toward the second barrier.

Down below, the Infantry was fighting through the plains. They had been fighting for three days now through the worst type of battle, and they were tired, but they had the Germans running now and they were anxious to press the advantage.

The tanks were pushing slowly up the roads in all directions, taking advantage of the gentle rolling plain that separated the two mountain ranges. The Infantry had started the Germans backward, and if they could get moving faster there would be many enemy casualties and heaps of wrecked vehicles lining the road that marks a rolling victory and a costly retreat for the enemy.

The Infantry, although they had passed through three days of fire that had changed them almost overnight from green troops to veterans, hurried on.

During the early hours of evening, they halted at the foot of the second range of mountains and dug little holes into the sides of the roads.

Fresh regiments took up the fight from there, and the Infantry infiltrated through into the mountains during the late afternoon, and continued to press forward during the night. By afternoon, the 48th had crossed the first range of mountains and paused in a forward command post in the valley. Patrols passed over the roads to complete reconnaissance over the valley, and by late afternoon, Spigno, was reported cleared.

Meanwhile, Colonel Swift informed his staff officers that a supply trail was needed over the mountains at once.

The valley extended laterally from east to west, and the second range of high mountains formed a barrier across the whole of the peninsula. Near the western coast, the mountains dipped almost into the sea, but there was a distance of a half mile from the water to the range that terminated in a flat plain. Through this plain ran the famous Via Appia, Highway Seven.

The Germans held there and no amount of fighting seemed to be able to move them. Fire from the

heights of the mountains covered the half mile of open space, and the Germans retreating from the Winter Line formed here to defend the second range.

Every hour that the Germans held the pass meant another hour that the Germans further inland could retreat up Highway Six and up the entire boot of Italy. Simultaneous attacks up the Liri Valley along Highway Six along with strong pressure from the English of the Eighth Army on the Eastern coast had the Germans reeling backward.

There were two main retreat routes, Highways Six and Seven. The Germans were dashing up them as fast as they could move out the cumbersome equipment of their modern army.

Since the pass was not going to fall easily by direct assault, the Fifth planned to outflank it by going over the mountains.

This was the 48th's job.

Almost immediately, the companies loaded up, and by evening, work had already started high up on the mountain near Spigno, on the Spigno Road.

The Spigno Road was intended to cross mile-high Mount Petrella and permit the Infantry to move around the pass to take the Germans by surprise several miles up Highway Seven when they attacked from the unexpected direction.

The Infantry had hurried along without support and were wiping out machine gun nests and snipers high in the mountains when the 48th arrived. Colonel Swift looked at the huge expanse of mountain and said to his officers, "It will be tough, but we can do it."

Back at the CP that had been established in the valley, a weeping, frightened, girl came dashing up the twisting road. She had been attacked by a Ghoul and her breast had been severely lacerated. Captain Snider administered first aid to the frightened girl and bound up her wounds and beaten face.

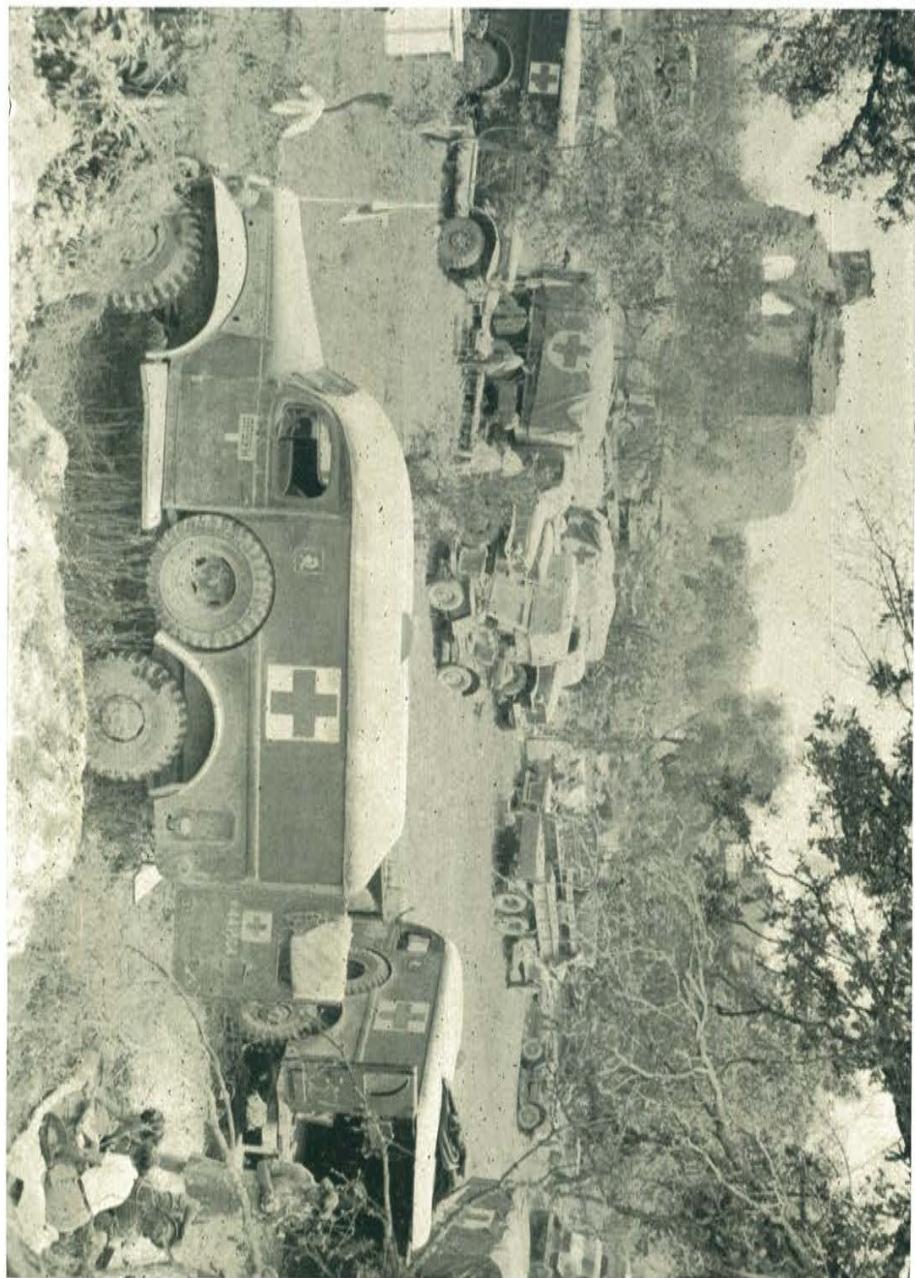
The girl sat on the steps of the building, and like a frightened animal that has been given shelter, refused to leave. The men of the 48th offered her "K" rations and candy and cigarettes. Presently she was smiling and had a small heap of presents at her feet.

Meanwhile, the Communications Section had been hiking over the mountain with their reels of wire, and were expected in by ten at night. A guide was left at the CP when the company pulled out for Spigno, to wait for the tired team and take them to Spigno.

So the guide and the girl sat there in the valley and listened to the rattle of small arms fire off on the mountainside as the company pulled out.



Scenery From the Spigno CP



The communication men didn't come in until nearly two in the morning, tired, wet, and dirty. They had been pinned down once by a machine gun and a sniper and had taken several pot shots at Lt. Williard as he led his team up over the mountainside. But there was communication over the mountain from Spigno to the rest of the army.

Lieutenant Williard asked the tired men if they wanted to try to make Spigno that night. A straw vote was taken, and the men elected to make the town. They clambered aboard their truck and went off down the road, in a tank barrage, to cross the mountain during the night.

The truck reached the mountain road and was starting up when a startled infantryman asked "What are you doing here? There is a counterattack up there. You can't get through." The men could hear the sound of automatic weapons off down the road, and the deep thud of a Browning Automatic Rifle. The counterattack had carried momentarily across the road, so the communication men elected to return to the valley.

They had no sooner settled down in their sleeping bags when a barrage settled down on them. One shell broke just outside the window of a room occupied by Cpl. Bob Forester, Sgt. Harold Rogers and two others. The next morning, the wire team was able to cross the road and take their truck around the twisting road that wound its way up the mountainside to Spigno.

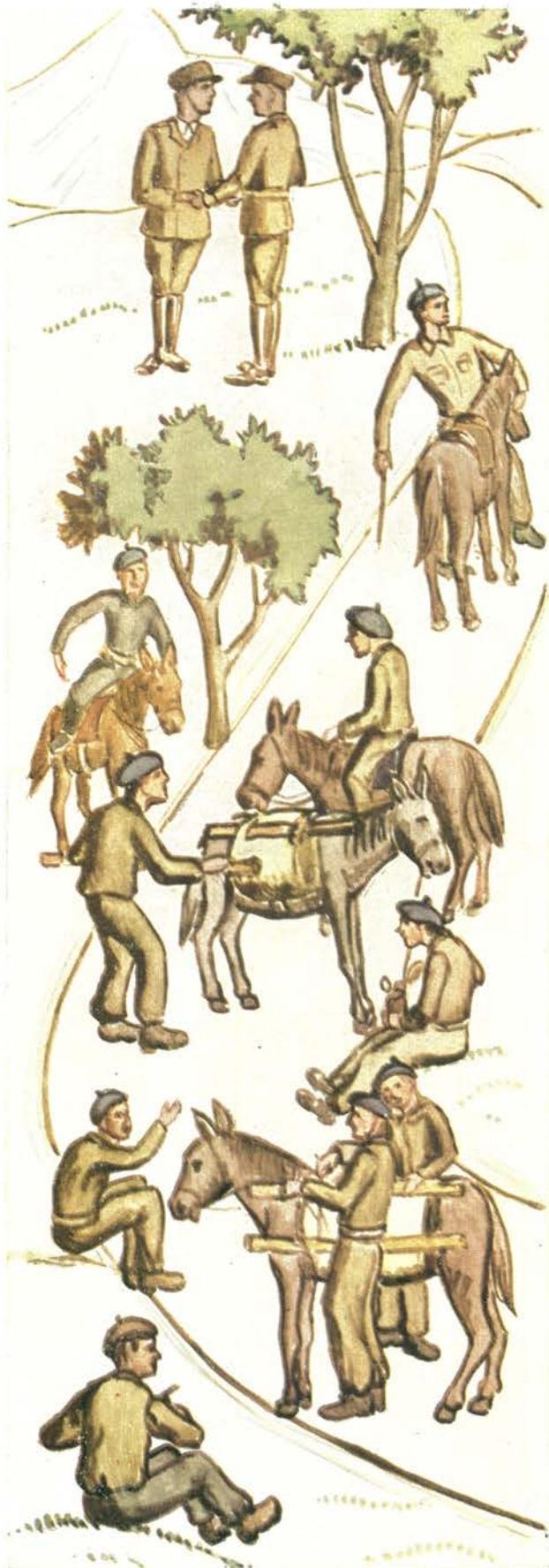
Meanwhile, a fire had started in Able Company's ammo dump and before it was put out, Able Company had five casualties. Three of the casualties from the flying shrapnel were cooks, so Able Company finished the drive to Rome practically without cooks.

The open enthusiasm of the victory-flushed American and French soldiers at Spigno was infectious. The Infantry was supposed to stop, but they refused orders and pushed on. Now they were without food and rations, somewhere in the mountain fastness. Obviously, somewhere ahead, the doughboys were doing a very creditable job without the assistance of phaselines and objectives.

It was a great day. We were rolling and the Germans were retreating. It made up for that long winter when we had lain near Cassino and Minturno and hoped and waited. Now we were almost running after the Germans and Rome did not seem so far away.

This was an infectious group of American kids who were winning a new game that someone had taught them, and they were thrilled. They couldn't be stopped. They were on their way.





Spigno was an international crumbled mass of stone and shattered wood where we could watch the world pass by. There were French soldiers and their brave women ambulance drivers, long lines of mules carefully tended by Italian Alpine troops. Then there were strings of German prisoners coming down the hills guarded sometimes by Americans and other times by the French Ghoums, who would wave their long cloaks to hurry the Germans along. In spite of the rubble, and the strangeness of the war torn surroundings of Spigno, the French would greet each other with all the graces and formality as though they had met along the main thoroughfare in Paris. The French nurses reserved a frigid cordiality in meeting the French officers and we would watch mystified as they would shake hands and bow, and then hurry out of the way of a passing jeep.

Meanwhile, Colonel Swift and a recon party had traced a rough route over the mountains. He reported by radio "I am now at the top of the mountain on reconnaissance of Petrella. Trail can be built but it is tough. Able and Charlie Companies will start work this afternoon." The two companies moved to bivouacs along the trail and began work immediately.

The trail was constantly in use. The Infantry was being supplied by mule train, and the sure-footed animals were picking their way up the twisting mule trail during the afternoon and evening. When the mules reached the working parties, the Engineers would pause briefly to watch the Italians tug the pack mules up the steep slopes.

Italian refugees had hidden in the hills high above the town when the first momentum of the offensive threatened to engulf the town. Now they were returning in pitiful small groups that picked their way slowly down the twisting trails to the shattered town at the foot of the mountain.

The refugees were a ragged lot. Their clothes were tattered from their flight through the brush, and dirty after many days in the hills. Many of the Italian women and girls balanced their valuables on their heads in wicker baskets that swayed gently from side to side as they bounced tiredly over the rough rocks of the trail.

Their legs were bleeding from the rocks and brambles along the trail, and many of them were without shoes.

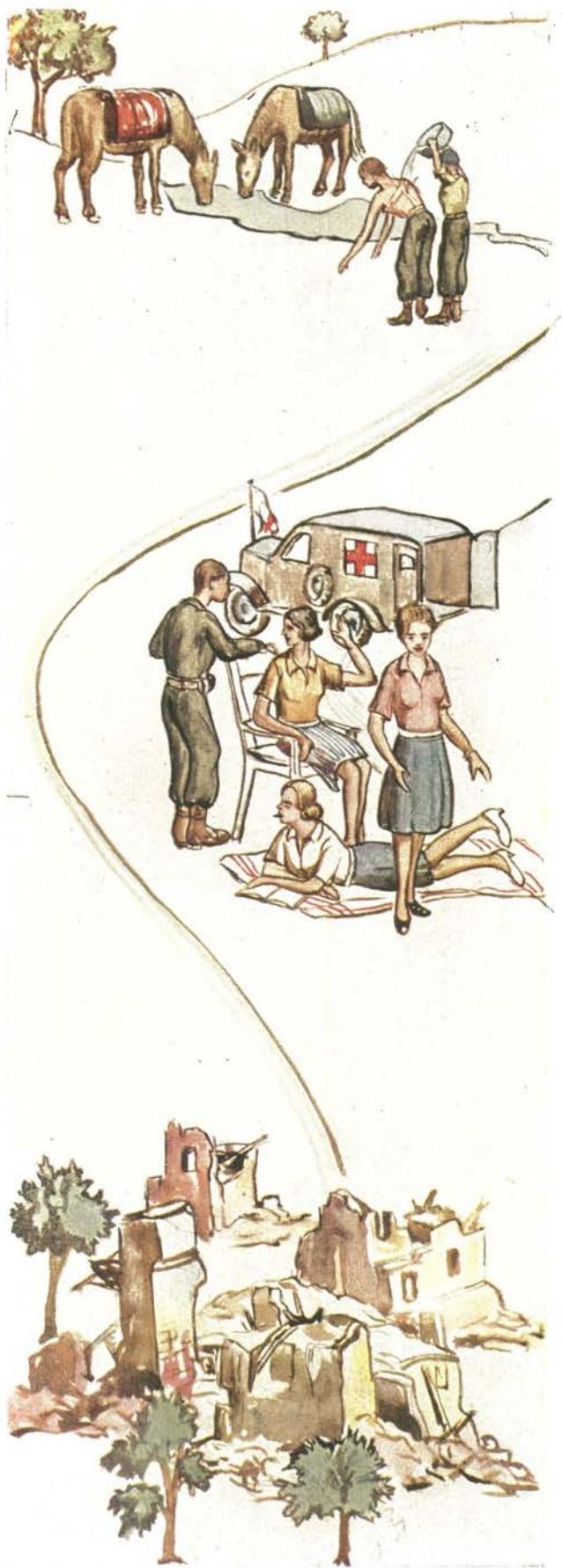
Ghoums along the trail waited for the small groups of refugees and then kept them moving by waving their long black cloaks and shouting in their strange language. They laughed like happy children as the frightened Italians ran down the path.

Somewhere far up the mountain, there was fighting, for there were little groups of twenty to thirty prisoners being taken at a time. The prisoners were collected along the side of the road, and then marched down through men and equipment working on the trail.

A bulldozer and road grader were urgently needed, but they were hopelessly entangled in the heavy traffic moving up the mountain road from Minturno. The companies would have to start in the morning without the heavy equipment, and use hand shovels to take the place of the bulldozer. This would take time, and time was precious in this job. Colonel Swift called Mr. Womble of S-4 and told him, "Get the other bulldozer from the Piper Cub Field that is using it. Also collect up our other bulldozers. I don't care what you have to do to get them." That was the kind of order Mr. Womble liked. He started immediately. Late that same afternoon, when Mr. Womble came with the heavy equipment to the turn which would start up the long winding road to Spigno, he was stopped by an MP who told him that his orders were to let no heavy equipment go up the mountain road. "Orders my eye," shouted Womble, "do as you please, but my colonel's orders are to get this equipment up the mountain," and up the mountain crept a grader, three D-7 bulldozers and three R-4 dozers. Fifteen jeeps and trailers that were attached to us as well as some Alpine troops with their mules soon followed. When the colonel heard this, he laughed, "Good job, Womble."

All three companies were on the trail as evening approached. A plan was worked out so that the companies could work on three separate stretches of the road and leapfrog each other as the road progressed. The companies moved out, hiking with field packs, for their stretches up the mountainside. It was tough going, but the men passed through the mule trains and refugees to reach their sites. They pitched their tents and slept through the night. The morning would bring a tough day.

Baker Company began at the first light of dawn after a cold breakfast of "K" rations. The men began to hack at the rough spots in the rock and shale with their picks and shovels. Other details started for the bottom of the hill for dynamite and shaped charges. When the detail returned, the explosive was set in the prepared holes and blown. Baker Company had a tough spot. All along the Baker stretch of road, the call was passed back, "Solid rock, send more explosives."



On The Trail



There was the constant cry, "Fire in the hole," which would sound faintly off in the distance at first, then louder as other details passed the word along, until all up and down the mule path the cry was re-echoed as the working parties took cover. Then there would be a loud explosion and the rattle of rocks clipping down the mountainside.

First came the outpost parties along with men carrying rolls of tracing tape. They would recon the trail and find the shortest possible route. Then they would push a nail through the tape, and hammer it into the ground. Shortly after came the advance demolition men who would hike along the trail until they found a spot where the explosives would be necessary. They would attack the spot with their picks and shovels and dig a hole into the rock, clearing the way for the demolition men. The demolition men would follow, looking for the holes along the path. They would set the demolition and take cover, shouting the warning to the men below. Each working party below would echo the cry all the way down the mountainside. Behind the demolition party came the working parties who cleared the underbrush and handled the hundreds of tough details along the route. Following them were the bulldozers which snorted and roared at the rock and pushed the hillside away.

Behind the work parties were the ammunition dumps and the supply parties. Then at the foot of the mountain was the command post where the details originated. The Communications Section was busily hurrying about. The S-4 section was bucking the traffic moving up with the dynamite and supplies.

On the morning of the second day, the men were finding stretches of the trail where only mules could carry the supplies. Jeeps and trailers took the supplies part of the way up the road to a forward dump, but from there it was a back breaking job for the men to carry them the rest of the way.

Sergeant Seiberling and Private Wynkoop were detailed to find some mules. "We don't care where you get them or how you get them, but bring them back," the men were told.

The two men started back down to the valley in a jeep and began circling out among the scattered farm houses of the valley. All along the road, there were dead mules, but the Germans had taken all of the live ones with them. For miles, the men looked, until they finally spotted six mules far out by a farm-house. Seiberling turned the jeep up the trail and raced to the farm house. The six mules belonged to an Infantry unit, and were diseased. They were going to be shot in the morning.





The two men were tired from their long ride over the hot dusty roads and their fruitless efforts to locate mules. They turned their jeep around from the valley and on to the circling road that led to the mountain at Spigno. They were beaten and didn't know where to look. They had just turned the first curve towards Spigno when they saw a long line of mules slowly working their way up the mountain road.

An Italian non-com walked at the head of the column. Seiberling brought the jeep to a halt and asked where the mules were going.

The Italians made it understood that the mules were to report to Americans near Spigno, but he didn't know the name of the unit. The two men lost little time in convincing the Italian that the unit was the Engineers working on the tough trail from Spigno. The Italian was told to bring his train up the trail and ask the officers along the way if they needed help.

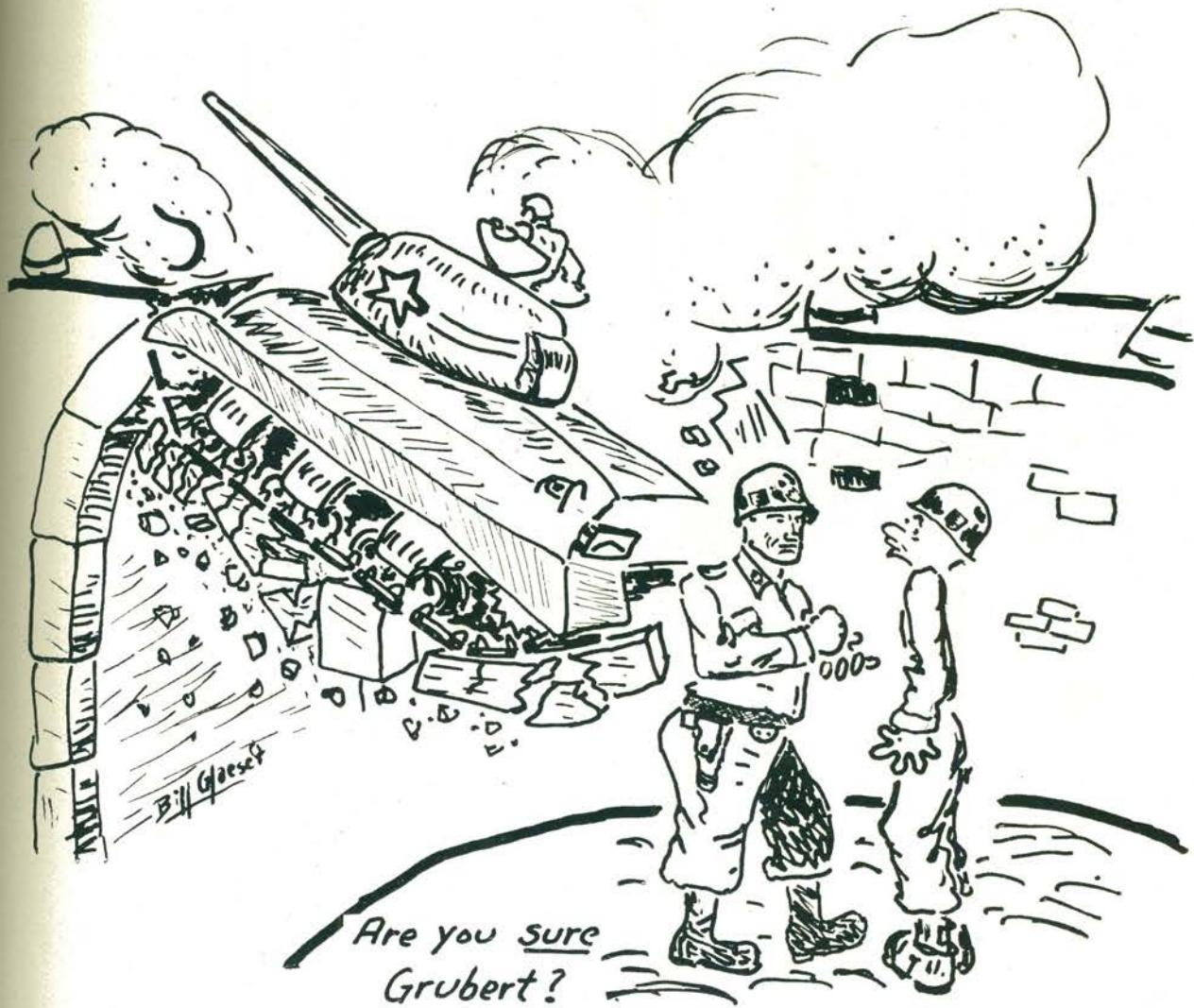
After that, the 48th had more than enough mules for the rest of our stay on Mt. Petrella.

Spigno was Ghoul territory. The happy French territorials were pushing out far ahead of the main body of troops in the rugged mountain fighting. When the Ghouls first reached Spigno, they appeared on the mountain wearing the multi-colored bright blankets and shawls from the demolished Italian houses in the rubbed town. They struck out across Mt. Petrella and slipped through the mountains.

The Ghouls were supposed to receive a bounty for the ears of German soldiers. They would cut off the ears of each enemy soldier that they killed to offer as proof to their officers. For a while, the 48th worried about the fact that there might be some individuals among the colorful desert fighters who might be making a career out of the army, and we nervously fingered our ears when the laughing brown men smiled at us. We were ordered to plaster adhesive tape over our helmets, and wear tracing tape when we slept at night. The Ghouls had been told that American soldiers would have white on their helmets while the Germans would not. We took this word as law, and we were wrapped in tracing tape before we turned in for the night. We placed our helmets carefully by our heads, and measured the visibility of the adhesive tape from all angles, before we slipped into our bedrolls.

The Ghouls moved noiselessly among the shadows during the night, and the guards started nervously at each little sound, but although we spent an uneasy night, the Ghouls didn't bother our ears.

Next to the CP building at the foot of the trail, a unit of French women ambulance drivers bivouaced. They were very friendly at first and some of the men took over the diplomatic responsibility of being "good neighbors". The French girls from Oran and Casablanca could speak a little English, and the men compared notes on Oran and St. Dennis and their African adventures for a while. It was a refreshing sight for the tired engineers, after a rugged climb up the dusty mountain, to see the lovely women reclining on the spotty grass of the mountain clearing. But the French girls preferred the company of the Ghoums and the French officers of their unit far more than the dusty engineers. The Ghoums worshipped the girls who followed them in battle, and apparently, the girls admired the stout fighting qualities of the Ghoums.



One American MP who was directing traffic up the mountain lost control of himself and when he ordered a French nurse to stop her vehicle and she did not obey, he shot her. From that moment we could sense a strong feeling of hostility between the nurses and the American soldiers. The nurses would tell the Ghoums how we Americans had shot one of them. The way the Ghoums eyed us we felt that we were in for trouble. That night we doubled our guard.

The mule trains passing over the sharp tangled rock of the trail were constantly cutting the telephone wires, that linked the companies and the dumps. The mountain was just one long hike for the communications section men. They had hardly rested from their first night of crossing the mountain when the line was cut again. They would move out, running along with the wire passing through their fingers, as they followed the trail. The mules were constantly moving off the trail, and for some unknown reasons, they would jerk straight up the mountainside, as if deliberately, to stamp out the telephone lines.

Work continued through the 17th of May as the men sweltered up the mountainside. The road now wound almost a mile into the sky and the tiny jeeps would unfurl a banner of brown dust as they moved through the turns and circled upward to the top. The road was rough and the jeeps dipped up and down and around the hairpin turns as they moved upward bringing trailers of supplies behind them.

The S-4 Section had opened up a maintenance and gas depot halfway up the mountainside, and the jeeps were serviced after each hard pull up the mountain. The mechanics moved over the little vehicles, and gassed them for the return trip down the mountain.

As the road progressed, the mule trains were able to move faster, and during the day, the uncompleted road became packed with trains of mules laden with "K" rations and ammunition working their way far into the mountains in support of the fast moving Infantry.

As night grew on, permission was requested to use lights on the road and illuminate the work sites so that work could continue uninterrupted. The road was leading out into enemy territory now and was working up a salient held by friendly troops. The Germans continued to hold the small gap between the mountains and the sea along Highway Seven far to the rear of Spigno, as well as many of the valleys to the right. The outflanking move up the Spigno supply road was meant to be a surprise move to the enemy, and it was thought that the lights would bring too much attention as well as a great deal of artillery fire on the road. Permission was refused. The Spigno road was too secret.

The men worked as long as they could into the night, and then crawled into their pup tents, dog-tired.

During the night, the Alpine troops and the engineers working on the supply detail used the break in work to move up more demolition for the morning.

The mules were being overworked. The Italian troops were constantly asking for more time and greater rest for their animals but the engineers, impressed with the necessity of speed, spared neither animals or the men who worked them. The mules were kept moving along almost constantly.

The 48th requested Italian troops to follow Americans with shovels and straighten out the road in the rough spots. There were too few men and the job was too big for the 48th to stop to do this. No Italians could be found, but eventually a group of Ghous was located, and they cheerfully picked up the shovels and picks and began to make the road a little less rough and bumpy.

The Ghous would cheer each jeep and trailer as they raced around the sharp hairpin turns of the mountainside, and chase each little frightened group of Italians as the refugees hurried along.

The 18th of May was a hurried day. The road was moving along well up into the mountain. The men could look down on the clouds in the valley below in many spots. The engineers teamed up to roll huge boulders off the trail hundreds of feet to the valley below. There would be a shout, "Lay hold, heave," and the men would lean against the huge rocks. Then the stone moved, and there would be a long mournful, "Look out, below," then the drop breathlessly for several seconds before it would shatter far down in the valley. The engineers would stand on the cliff and watch, laugh, and then move towards another boulder.

Bulldozer operators would swing their machine at crazy angles to attack the stubborn rock of the trail. The big machines would stand on their blades while the tracks clattered on the shale. Then the track would hold momentarily and the roadside bank would crumble under the pressure. Then the cat would back off, turn around and sweep the rock and debris off into the valley below.

There wasn't a straight stretch of road to work. The dozers were always working tipped to one side or the other, or else standing on their noses or rearing back until their cable boxes touched the ground.

It was tough bulldozer territory among the rocks, and the shale would rip the shoes from the tracks. But the sturdy D-7s would back off and charge into the tangled rock of the mountainside and fight with all their power. It was tough work, but the big cats were slowly winning. Back further on the road, the smaller R-4s followed, cleaning off the ledges, and forming the road. They cut down the bank and pushed the piles of dirt and rock to the low spots where the road dipped away. Slowly they filled the low spots and cut away the high crowns until there was a semblance of a road.

The men were in constant danger from the demolition. The cry "Fire in the hole," would be repeated down the hillside, and the men would look for cover. There was very little cover where they needed it—over head. The rock shower from the blast hundreds of feet above was like an aerial burst, and the sharp rocks of the demolition charges would whistle through the air like hot shrapnel and drop among the dispersed

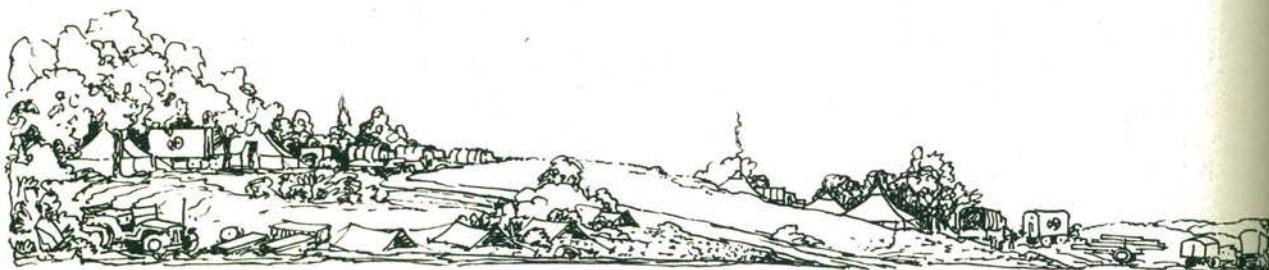


working parties below. Tony Boyd, 48th Engineer cameraman, caught one rock right over the eyebrow that knocked him spinning. He picked himself up, dazed, as the aid man hurried to help him.

But there were no serious casualties on the Spigno Trail. There were countless bumps and bruises, and flying rock dented more than one helmet during the work.

The road was a great venture. The possibilities were enormous. The road was to cut north through the mountains and outflank the stubborn resistance in the small gap on Highway Seven. The Germans would be neatly pocketed between American forces at both ends and sheer trackless mountains on one side with the sea on the other.

But late in the afternoon of May 19th, the following message was received from 1108th Group Headquarters, "Abandon all work on jeep trail. Move Battalion to within two kilometers in the vicinity of M-7396 (Itri) by order of the Commanding General." Work on the trail stopped immediately and the companies assembled to move out before dusk. The Infantry had broken through the resistance near the sea and the Germans were in full retreat up Highway Seven along the small coastal plain. The Spigno trail was no longer needed. If the Germans had held another day, the trail would have been completed and would have been one of the most daring military ventures in the entire Italian campaign.



TERRACINA

The Battalion closed in the area of Itri by 2000 hours. Headquarters was located in Castle Pellegrini on the top of Mt. Scauri. The mountain extended out into the Tyrrhenian Sea a few kilometres across the water from the town of Gaeta, which was just coming under attack.

Mt. Scauri had been a famous tourist landmark for the ancient Temple of Janus was located just a few hundred yards behind the castle. Janus was a two faced God that looked into the future with one face, and into the past with the other. The immense steps of inlaid marble were still plainly visible, although there was not a great deal of the temple left. Huge column sections lay scattered in the field to mark the immensity of the once-proud temple.

The castle surroundings had been prepared to repel a seaborne invasion. During the drive to Rome, the 36th Division had pulled back to the vicinity of Naples to practice invasion tactics, and the whole thing had prepared the Germans for an invasion somewhere along the coast. As a result, many of the German crack divisions had been held along the coast to repel the threat, so they did not have a chance to take an organized part in the fighting until the remnants of the German Army came sweeping back from the Winter and the Gustav lines.

Castle Pellegrini was one of the fortified places that the Germans had prepared. Barbed wire entanglements had been strung all along the coast of the Gulf of Gaeta, and minefields abounded in the sand. There were "Achtung Minen" signs all over the island, and the men of the 48th were careful where they walked. Cement bunkers with 88s had been hollowed out of solid rock and camouflaged so well that it would have been almost impossible to see them from the sea. Stockpiles of ammunition had been hauled to the island, and had been hidden in caves, where they could have easily been moved to support the guns.

The castle was an architectural feat of beauty. The owner and builder, Count Pellegrini, took some of the men and officers through the building, and the huge watchtower. The count was a graduate of Columbia University and was the president of the Electrical Corporation of Naples.

The first work of the 48th was to sweep mines along the stretch of Highway Seven. In the afternoon, the men found a rubbed house in Fondi holding up traffic. A bulldozer was dispatched and speedily swept the debris from the road.

The following morning, May 21st, the Battalion moved past Gaeta Point to Fondi in the first marshland below the Pontines.

The Infantry was having a tough time at the approaches to the town of Terracina and it looked as though the Germans might make a stand there.

During the night, enemy bombers came over the town. They circled casually for some time but all was still. Then one of the planes dipped slowly, and came in with a loud shriek. There was a low whistle followed by an explosion that rocked the companies. The sky was suddenly filled with ack-ack as the guns opened up on the enemy planes. There was an attack, and they were prepared to repel it. The whole Battalion ducked for cover as the planes circled again and again at low altitude to make runs on a Cub Airport just outside of the town.

Most of the planes took their diving run from the sea to the field below the mountains and pulled up the steep slope as the guns reached for them. The enemy planes were releasing their bombs over Headquarters Company, and the men could hear the whistling shriek as they carried downward. The speed of the bombs

carried them over the railroad station where they were dropped and into the Cub field a few hundred yards away. But it was a nervous night. The vehicles and equipment stood out in the moonlight, and the railroad station with the shining rails made a sure target. The men lay in the basement or around the area outside of the station and worried.

But the enemy planes confined their bombing to the airfield. The next morning we saw craters sixty feet across and ten feet deep close enough to the railroad station to give most of the men the shivers. There had been casualties among the personnel of the airfield, but the companies of the Battalion bivouaced around the field had received nothing more than a sleepless night and a good scare.

Public interest is a fickle thing that is molded by the sensational or the unexpected, rather than samples of everyday usage and ingenuity. So it was with Terracina. Unfortunately, one of the most interesting engagements in the whole of American military history seems to be going by the boards merely because it happened at the wrong time. The battle at Terracina came too fast between the sudden surge of stories as the American Army broke the Winter Line, and too soon before the dramatic meeting of the Anzio Beachhead and the forces from Southern Italy.

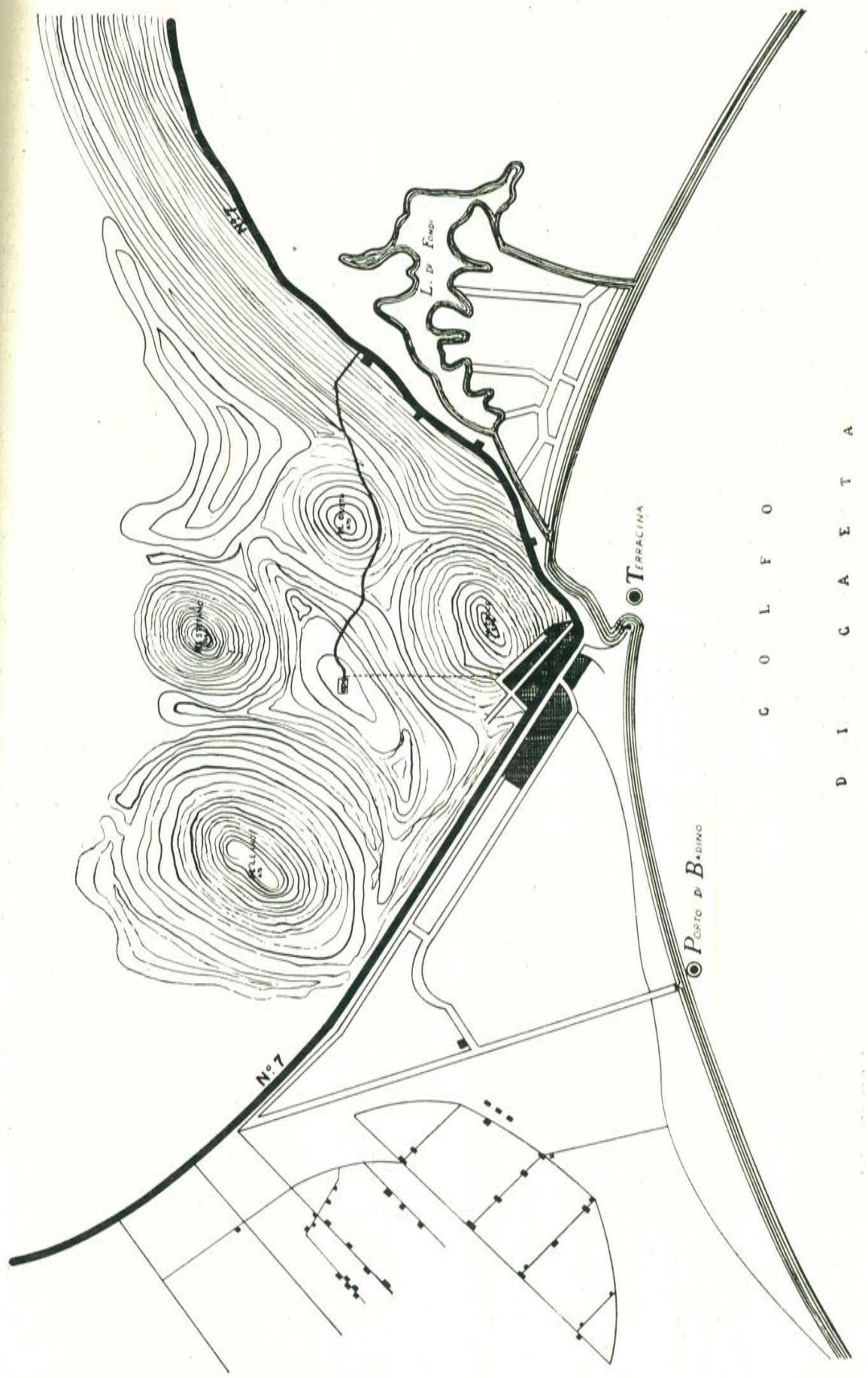
The men involved were probably 1500 on the American side and possibly less on the German side. Terracina was not a battle of material or men. It was a chessboard battle of fast thinking. It was a battle of plans and counterplans made hastily on the spot with objectives that held the entire campaign in the balance. The Germans worked on the principle that tanks could go some places and other places they could not go, and that artillery could reach some spots and other spots would be safe for days and months. It worked on the old military axiom that a defending force can hold off any force from good positions for a considerable length of time.

The German positions were a tacticians dream. The Germans could choose the battlefield. There was only one road leading north and south—the famous Highway Seven that reached from Minturno in the South to the Pontine Marshes on the North.

American military traffic would have to follow this road all the way to town. On one side was the sea, and on the other was a high range of mountains that followed along the ancient route paralleling the road until the town of Terracina, where the mountain chain turned to the left and dropped off sheer to the sea. The edge of the mountain had been blasted to permit Highway Seven to move toward the sea, following the base of the mountain, and then around the end of the mountain through a thirty foot expanse of roadway that had been blasted and hewed out of solid rock. Mount Croce, the mountain mass, commanded the whole of Highway Seven for a distance of several miles as it crossed the flat plain below. The mountain ended in a sheer cliff near the sea where a hundred foot cliff dropped off to the thirty foot embankment where Highway Seven skirted the base. First came the sea, then a scant twenty foot sheer embankment carrying the thirty foot Highway Seven, then rising sheer, the hundred foot cliff sweeping back to Mount Croce. Here was a problem—to see if the Fifth Army could pass through the eye of the needle!

The Germans well realized that Terracina might be the turning point in the current drive. Here was a natural strongpoint. The battleground could not be more than a square mile in area and would be framed by the sea on the left and the mountains on the right. In front of the Americans would be the natural rugged mountain barrier of Mount Croce, and behind them, nothing but empty flat marshes to maneuver their forces. This would be no battle of overpowering materials, for only a few men could be employed in the narrow valley. The Germans prepared Mount Croce as an impregnable position. Every foot of open space was covered by a machine gun and every spot where Infantry could move upward was zeroed in with mortars. An assault gun was hauled to the peak of Mt. Croce where it could sweep the open top of the hill with fire. Tank pits were dug in the road and covered with bituminous, to slow down the tanks as they took the turn and make them an easy kill for bazooka men and an anti-tank gun. When the first Americans appeared far down the valley, Mount Croce was an impregnable fortress, for the Germans had completed the few little tasks that nature had forgotten.

The fruits of victory were hanging just out of reach for the Americans. Around the hook of Terracina lay the flat marshlands of the Pontines, without a possible defense anywhere south of the beachhead. If they could move into the Pontines, they could badly outflank the German defenses to the south of the beachhead, and forge ahead to a junction with the Anzio forces through the level Pontines. The Germans were on their last defensive position. If they could hold, their forces at southern Anzio could withdraw, and other German



troops, moving up through the center of Italy on Highway 6, could escape without incurring any great losses when the beachhead broke laterally across Italy. A lot depended on one little hill.

The spearhead of American tanks moved up the valley without drawing fire and began to crawl around the base of Mount Croce where it jutted out into the sea. Somehow, the tankers found the bituminous covered tank traps and missed them, but it slowed the tanks down as they reached the blind curve. There was still no enemy fire and the tanks had already reached the blind curve where the thirty feet of roadway lay under the cliff to the right where the mountain had been blasted and the cliff dropping on the left to the sea. It was just after six in the morning and it looked like a good day for the tankers. Fifty feet more and they would be rolling across the billiard-table flatness of the marshes with good hunting ahead. This was the last of the tankers nightmare—mountains. There was plenty of good tank country just around the bend.

The lead tank hesitated for a moment and then swung around the turn. It exposed its sides, and two bazookas stopped it dead. The hatch flew open and closed as the tank burst into flames. Not a man came out.

The second tank moved out, partially protected for a moment by the burning one. As it swung wide towards the water, it hit a mine and burst into flames. The hatch on that tank stayed closed too.

The thirty feet of roadway was plugged now, and the bazookamen and the 88 could hit anything that tried to move around the turn. The Germans had the first round. It looked like the tanks wouldn't make the Pontines that day.

Someone suggested a tank dozer to topple the burned tanks off the cliffs into the sea. But the tankers realized that it, too, would get hit. And even if they could get the road open again, they would be back where they started from. No tank could ever get through that open thirty feet of space without getting hit at least three times. Wise tankers told the Infantry that the bazookamen and the gun would have to be silenced before tanks could help. The tankers had lost two good tanks and eight good men in less than five minutes. There was no reason to ask any more to try it. It was plain foolishness to turn that corner into the face of an anti-tank gun and expose your sides to bazookamen.

But the Infantry couldn't get around that corner, either, because there would be mortars zeroed in and machine guns taped on that thirty foot stretch, besides a lot of Germans well dug in, waiting for them. The only thing they could do was wait until night, and then rush the position. But precious time would be lost. In one day, the Germans could evacuate a lot of men. The German flank at Anzio was turned and open, and the main German forces were moving up Highway 6, badly outflanked already.

Perhaps this position could be outflanked. The Infantry looked at the sheer hundred foot cliff and shook their heads. May be back further...

Mount Croce swept perpendicular to the line of the mountains from the hook of Terracina. It was rock most of the way, but there where it joined the other hills, there was a steep slope.

By eight o'clock, the 48th had been alerted to build a tank road up Mt. Croce. Lieutenant Conklin and volunteers from Able Company were sent to recon a route. The recon party started moving up a gentle slope of terraced grape vineyards that ranged along the mountain parallel to Mt. Croce and attempted to find a method of getting to the top.

Meanwhile, out on Terracina hook, Company E of some unknown regiment of the 85th Division moved out to storm the top of Mt. Croce directly. It wasn't long before the doughboys found that the Germans had anticipated that maneuver, too. A steady stream of machine gun tracers found the brown figures as they crawled and dodged through the rocks, dragging themselves upward toward the mountaintop. Casualties were heavy. A forward aid station was taking a steady stream of stretchers. Another company started after the lead outfit, and then another fell in behind them. Mortars opened up and blasted among the rocks, but the Infantry continued upward. It was nothing but sheer guts that kept them moving against that fire.

Lieutenant Conklin's men were moving along the landward side of Mount Croce now. The bulldozer had already started in their rear to level the grapevines and heave rocks aside far down the hillside. The dozer had trouble getting through the rocky grape terraces that lined the first gentle slope of Mount Croce, but by noon, the road was beginning to reach the approaches to the worn dome of Mt. Croce.

Lieutenant Conklin had found a lucky break meanwhile. The 48th wasn't the first group of men faced with the problem of getting around Mt. Croce. The ancient Romans were helping Lieutenant Conklin to

THE 48th COMES TO TERRACINA



complete his reconnaissance, for there near the top of Mt. Croce, was part of the old Appian Way, with every stone intact. The stretch led along for several hundred yards almost to the top of the mountain. The ancient Roman engineers like the 48th, had been looking for the easiest way across the mountain, and the road took advantage of every little break in the contour of the hill.

The only break was at the bottom, where years of landslides had undermined the road and obliterated it completely. Apparently, it had followed the same route that the bulldozer was now patiently clearing into a usable road bed.

Lieutenant Conklin hurried back to inform the bulldozer to connect into the ancient road, and to tell the surprised tankers that they would have a paved road to the top of Mount Croce in an hour.

Meanwhile, the Infantry had wormed their way from rock to rock until they were approaching the table-like top of the worn mountain and had located two main points of opposition. There was a graveyard nestled in the rumpled top of the mountain. It was surrounded by a sturdy stone wall. The Germans were using the tombs and several small buildings inside the wall as natural firing points. Then, where Mt. Croce jutted out into the sea, there was a peak that commanded a view of the entire area of the top of the mountain and a good portion of the slope. The Germans had pulled an artillery piece into position behind the slope and were taking a heavy toll of Infantrymen, as the doughboys attempted to cross the rim of the hillside and reach the rugged dome of the mountain.

Lieutenant Conklin, too, was beginning to draw fire as he led his men and the bulldozer forward. At one spot on the Appian Way, the road took a sharp turn through a small defile that would have to be opened for the tanks. Lieutenant Conklin stood in the open to direct the bulldozer when a flurry of small arms kicked up dirt around him. He ducked back into the shadow of the rocks and tried to find the sniper. Every time a man would pass the opening between the rocks, a shot would ring out. The Engineers continued on the road and waited for the Infantry to envelope the spot where the sniper was firing from somewhere off to the left.

Meanwhile, Captain Munson and Colonel Swift moved ahead of the men and reached the summit of the hill. The Infantry were pinned down there and a first sergeant and a few of his men were carefully moving back down the road. They were whipped. They had gotten to the cemetery, but couldn't get across the wall, and the open fields reaching to the cemetery made excellent fields of fire for the defenders. There was no method of getting near the cemetery to root the Germans out.

The Infantry just didn't have the weapons and they couldn't cross that open stretch of field under direct fire of the Germans behind the stout walls of the cemetery. There were no officers left in the outfit after that climb up the mountainside and the sergeant had very few men left. Then the sergeant saw the first of the 24 medium and light tanks approaching the summit over the new road. That was all he needed. He was fighting mad now. He yelled at his men, made sure they all saw the tanks, and whipped them back into file column and started up again to the cemetery.

Meanwhile, the first tank had thrown its track trying to get around the tight corner in the new trail, and the Engineers were feverishly trying to get it out of the way.

Soon they had pushed it aside and the tanks began to round the corner, firing with everything they had. The German mortars were strangely quiet, but a few startled German machine gunners opened up trying desperately to stop the tanks.

Tanks on the top of a mountain were something the Germans hadn't figured on. But the tanks that were in the valley at eight in the morning were on the top of the impassable mountain by two in the afternoon.

The artillery piece up on the peak of the mountain was silent also. Perhaps, they too, had only figured on Infantry, and had only HE shells, and not a bit of armor piercing. The shrapnel would dust off the thick-skinned tanks like the futile German machine gun bullets were doing now.

But periodically, the gun would fire at groups of men as they crossed an open spot on the brow of the hill.

The tanks moved out across the top of the hill and charged towards the cemetery. The stone walls were no match for the guns of the tanks, and the Infantry moved across the open space as the tanks thundered out ahead of them.

The startled Germans, caught by the surprise of the maneuver, attempted to race from the cemetery and escape down the far slope of the mountain, but the tank machine guns opened up on them with deadly effect.

The tanks found about twenty feet of level rock where the old Appian Way had skirted the peak of the mountain and lined up to plaster the flatlands of the Pontines. It was late afternoon now, and the light was getting dull, but the Germans could be seen running from their holes in the valley, and moving back into the Pontines in hopeless confusion.

The snipers and the gun were still causing trouble behind the tanks, but the Infantry was forming mop-up squads to complete consolidation of the mountain. Some of the men of the 48th went on a sniper hunt along the path of the road, but apparently, the troublesome snipers at the bend had been eliminated.

The road was to be ready for trucks in the morning, so Captain Munson and Corporal Gularite climbed into the armored cab of the bulldozer to complete the road to the cemetery, where an excellent path led down the mountain to the Pontines. The Germans soon saw the exhaust sparks and dropped mortar shells about the dozer. The oil line broke and spattered oil over the cab. The men inside, thinking that the dozer had been hit, hastily abandoned it as well as the finishing touches to the road.

The battle was over by eight o'clock that night. The real opposition had crumbled by three, and the rest was mopping up pockets and outposting what had been gained. By morning, American troops had crossed Mt. Croce and moved into the valley as recon forces moved unopposed past the two wrecked tanks on Highway Seven. One day later, the Anzio Beachhead was reached.



CASSINO - ANZIO LINK-UP

It was the 24th of May and the 48th was running wild. Baker company had been attached to elements of the 91st Recon with the mission of pressing the Germans fast through the Pontines so that they would not have time to blow the many bridges in the lowlands. The other two companies had reconnaissance duties in the Pontines too, so the 48th Engineer trucks were rounding the hook of Terracina bumper to bumper and fanning out in the flatlands of the Pontines in all directions.

1108th Group kept sending messages, "Push recon ahead. Prevent those bridges from being blown." Throughout the day, the 48th pushed. Captain Munson of Able Company spotted a motorcycle and three truck loads of Germans moving northwest. Baker Company moved with the tank groups of recon in their squad trucks, pacing the rolling light tanks and recon cars. The 48th jeeps were everywhere.

The radios of the recon squadron would keep blaring out, "Pebble pushers, pebble pushers, we need you at once." Pebble pushers was the code word they used for engineers. Frequently, they wanted Colonel Swift to report to their headquarters. The air would then resound with, "Calling, Big Cheese, calling, Big Cheese." "Big Cheese" was the code word for Colonel Swift.

Private Kall of Baker Company said, "We were passing through the small town of Serra Moneta when an Italian civilian ran up and told us that there were Germans bivouaced near the town. They were occupying a monastery that had been turned into a hospital. We moved quickly for the monastery. The recon was in the lead as we approached the cluster of buildings cautiously. Suddenly, just about fifty yards from the hospital, a machine gun opened up. Immediately, we all took for cover. Just then a jerry half-track pulled out of the driveway, and one of our accompanying armored cars took out after it. It wasn't long before we heard the sound of machine gun fire, and presently our car returned—victoriously. Then more German machine guns opened up, and a flak-wagon began to fire. Shells were beginning to land everywhere. One shell landed about ten feet from the third squad, killed a soldier, wounded an officer and completely wrecked a jeep. There was too much firepower against us, so we radioed for some light tanks for assistance. Four light tanks rushed up presently, and began to spray the buildings with everything they had. For half an hour they blasted away. Then the signal was given and we rushed the position. A recon car led our jeep as we moved in. A machine gun began to fire at us. Private Purdy quickly turned the jeep off and made for a defilade. There was a small tunnel nearby and Purdy ran for it. Just as he approached, a German soldier stepped out. Purdy swung his submachine gun on the German and called for the man to halt."

"Lieutenant O'Leary came running to the scene as more German soldiers came out of the rocks with their hands held high. Trucks were brought up and the Germans loaded on them. Meanwhile, the tanks went after the flak wagon and knocked it out. Before the spot was cleaned out, Baker Company and the recon had captured 108 prisoners and killed some, too."

Pfc. Yeager described another skirmish with the Germans while with the recon. "It was during one of the forward moves up Highway Seven that we noticed a huge column of smoke arise about four miles to our right. Immediately, the recon set off in that direction to investigate. Twenty minutes later they came back with an assignment. The smoke we saw was Jerry blowing a bridge. So we were to build a by-pass around it. Off we went, with the bulldozer close behind us, and fifteen minutes later we were hard at work on the by-pass. Just about two hours after we started work on the by-pass, we noticed an Italian civilian running down the road towards us. The recon men had him covered so we continued to work. He came up to the



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AT THIS SPOT
MEN OF THE 48 ENGRS
MET A PATROL OF
THE 36TH ENGRS
AND JOINED THE
5TH ARMY-ANZIO FORCES
0731 MAY 25 1944

recon and began jabbering in Italian and also gesturing toward the town. We finally made out that there were still Germans in that town up on the hill. We paid no attention to this bit of information because these people would steer you wrong every chance they got. He was told in no uncertain terms to beat it. We resumed work again and before long we had the job completed. By this time it was growing dark and we looked around for a bivouac area. The second platoon of Baker Company found a house to sleep in while the bulldozer and the recon men stood by the by-pass for the night. We took out our ten-in-one rations and made a good hot meal, the first one of the day, for we had travelled far and swiftly all that day. After we had eaten, we talked a little and then went to bed."

"The next morning we were awakened by the shriek of an incoming shell. Immediately, everyone started to look for a deep hole to dive in, but there were none around so we stood, shaking in the house. The Italian occupants of the house were even more scared than we were, and they looked to us for help. All we could do was whisper words of encouragement, more for ourselves than for them. Then through the open driveway came three recon cars with the driver of the first car bleeding badly. Quickly our aid men came to the rescue. From them we got the rest of the story. There were Jerries up in that town and what is more, they had plenty of artillery and ammunition. They had dropped about nine shells in the recon bivouac area knocking out two tanks from the recon, one jeep, and our R-4 dozer, and its accompanying four ton prime mover. It had been a costly morning but luckily no one was killed. It was the one time that Private Clarence Owens had really moved. He was sleeping soundly when the first shells came in, and in no time at all he was out of his bed roll and in a nearby culvert, leaving behind him shoes and all. He stayed there a good part of the day until finally Lieutenant Phelan came and picked him up. That morning we had no appetite for breakfast and without a pause for anything we left that hot spot. We were slightly worried at pulling back because we were in the open most of the time on the road. The rest of the day was spent in getting back our nerve which had suddenly deserted us. That night we slept well and the next morning, with our minds set, we went back to that fateful town on the hill. We were going down the road and every man was tense and ready. Thirty-sevens, fifty calibre machine guns, and rifles were all pointed at that town. It was all in vain, for the Germans had moved out of the town that night, and we entered the town of Sezze without opposition. We didn't relax our vigil, however, and we looked at the passing civilians with suspicion. We went over that town with a fine tooth comb in the hopes that we might flush a Jerry, but they were all gone. It was on one of these patrols that we ran into a sight that was so horrible that it is difficult to describe. It was a church that was turned into a hospital. It had a big red cross painted on the roof, but to us it was just one gigantic morgue. There were perhaps fifty dead people in this building, some men, women and children. It was a ghastly sight and it turned our stomachs just to look at them. There were small babies, barely three months old, laying alongside of their mothers. We thought it was tragic that one so young should have to die like that. We could almost read the agony and torture written on their faces. These people were killed in air raids and this, if nothing else, struck home to us the fact that bombs have no eyes. Those bombs obviously were meant for the fortifications across the road, but somehow had missed the targets. Right there we offered a short prayer that this should never happen in America."

"It was a short time after our trip through that fly infested morgue that a jeep, bearing Major General Keyes, Commanding Officer of the Second Corps, and the Commanding General of the 85th Division, drove up and parked right behind our truck. Immediately, our squad leader, Sergeant Shultz, reported to him. After he held a brief conversation with the sergeant he left, and Sergeant Shultz came back with a message from General Keyes. The General had said, "You are doing a fine job, keep up the good work." At that message we swelled with pride. We thought, "Imagine a two star general actually paying us that compliment." It was with those words that we turned our trucks northward and started once more on the "Drive to Rome."

Pfc. Titecomb relates an incident of Able Company in the Pontine Marshes. "It was just about dusk one night when the men of the second squad, second platoon were told to roll up their bed rolls and get ready to move out. They weren't told what they were to do until they had arrived at their destination. The job was to repair a by-pass that was still in, but due to long usage by heavy vehicles, it had deep ruts in the middle of it where it was wet. Everything was quiet while they were unloading their equipment from the truck. They loaded the truck with rubble from the blown bridge and had it unloaded partially when the first action occurred. It was bright moonlight and the men heard an aeroplane circling around as though it was hunting for a target. They finally spotted the plane and recognized it to be German. The men stopped



THE PONTINE MARSHES

working and dispersed around the truck. The plane went on a little way and the men finished unloading the truck. Just as they were getting the second load of rubble, the plane came back again and this time he strafed the road. However, there were no casualties among the men. The men heard the plane go over and turn around and come back. This time they heard him drop bombs up ahead and to the left of them. The plane was so low that it sounded like it was going through the houses that were in the immediate area."

The 48th was fanning out all through the level Pontines and there seemed to be nothing in their way. The Germans were being pressed fast.

The entire area had been reclaimed from the sea in a series of projects by the Italian government. Dykes had been built to keep the water out, and the fresh water canals laced the entire region. These canals were controlled by a series of dams that crossed the entire countryside.

If the Germans were able to blow the dams, almost the entire countryside and the lowlands would be returned to the sea. So the 48th was ordered to push and push hard.

The Germans were anxious to pull out of the territory, for the Anzio Beachhead had jumped off and was pushing, and the Fifth Army was rounding the hook of Terracina in a steady stream that overflowed into the Pontines. The German divisions that were holding the right flank of the beachhead were being pushed from the front and in vital danger of being cut off from the rear in the next 48 hours. They were rushing out as fast as they could under the constant pressure of the beachhead. The tables were turned and their time was short. The Germans tried desperately to save what they could from the remains of the former steel ring that enclosed Anzio and Nettuno.

At 0731 on the 25th of May, Lieutenant Francis X. Buckley and Pfc. "Pancho" Savala of Baker Company were roving ahead on a recon assignment. They had passed miles of undisturbed countryside when suddenly up ahead loomed a blown bridge. Leaving their jeep, they proceeded on foot. They reached the outskirts of the small town of Borga Grappa, when they noticed a group of men working on the by-pass of a blown bridge on the far side of the town. At the sight of the men they stopped.

"They're Americans," Lieutenant Buckley told "Pancho," and they moved forward again.

An officer detached himself from the group, and the men straightened from their work momentarily.

"Where in the devil do you think you're going?" he called to Lieutenant Buckley.

"We're contacting the beachhead," Lieutenant Buckley answered.

"Well, brother, you've done it," the officer replied. "I'm Captain Ben Suza of the 36th Engineers."

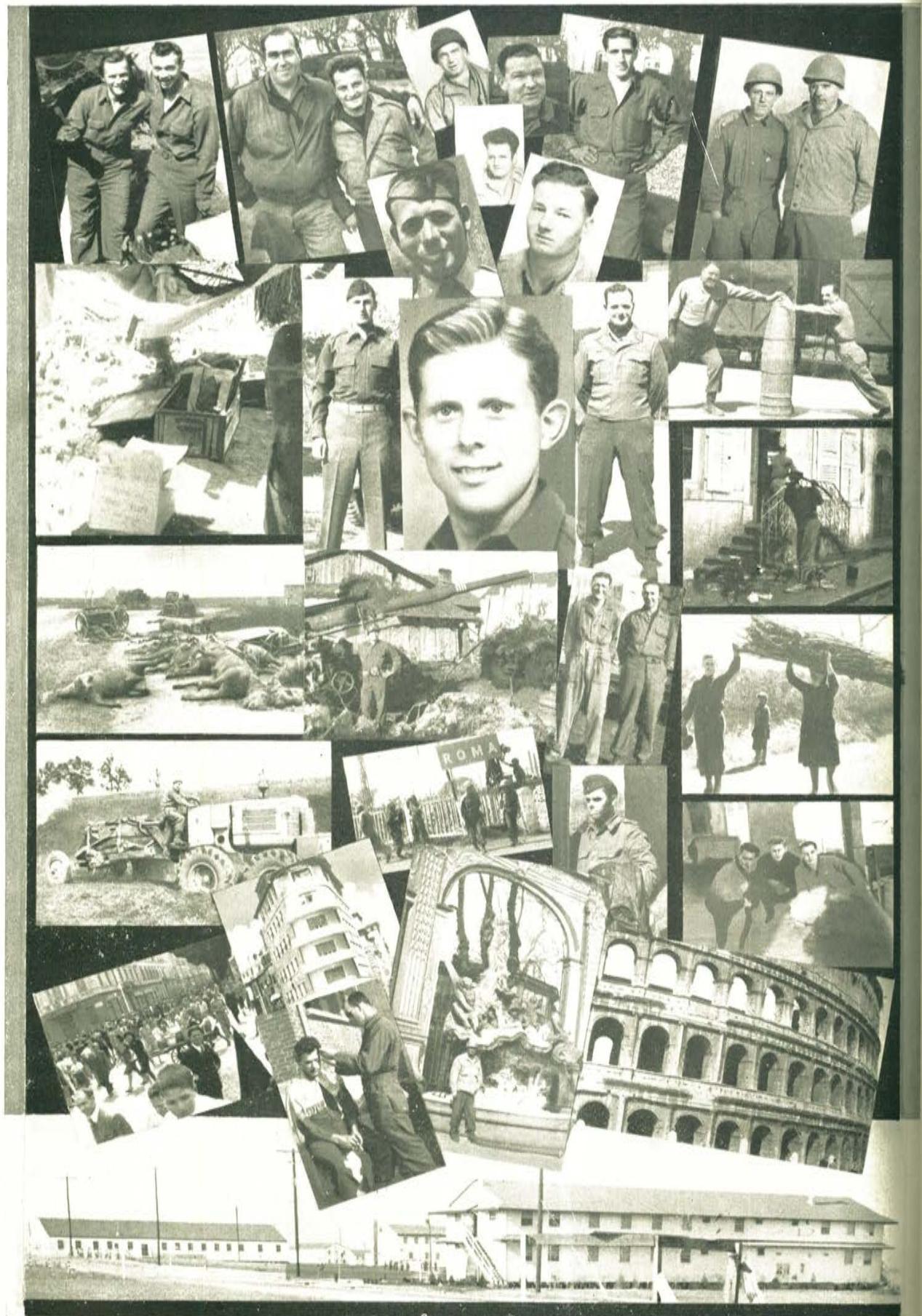
The Stars and Stripes of May 26th reports... "Things took on a more festive air when a convoy of jeeps led by Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, Fifth Army Commander, and full of photographers and correspondents arrived at the scene. Lieutenant Buckley, who had made the sixty mile trip from the Southern Front to Anzio in 14 days, approached the General, snapped to attention and reported, "Sir, Lieutenant Buckley, Company B of the 48th Engineers making contact with the beachhead."

By afternoon, more than ten patrols of the 48th had made contact with the beachhead forces at several different spots. Even the air-force recon planes kept guiding our most forward elements. The 48th had made world history. The invasion of Anzio had occurred January 22nd, and now after 125 days had elapsed, the forces had joined. The mud and the misery of Anzio were gone. The two fronts were united now against one objective—the Eternal City of Rome.

The 48th rolled through the beachhead, and the men passed through the former German positions high on the hills. We could understand now why Anzio was so rough. The beach had the appearance of a half-saucer. The part of the historic battlefield that the Americans held was a flat valley. All around on three sides were hills where the Germans had ringed them. It was possible to see almost every single square foot of the beachhead from the German positions. The Germans had clung to the hills and plastered anything moving on the flat expanse of ground below.

All around the hills outside of Cisterna was the wreckage of the hard fighting which had taken the Third Division inland. The armor and equipment of the once proud Wehrmacht forces which had surrounded Anzio for months were scattered hopelessly about in disorderly piles. The ground was chewed by artillery as though some gigantic creature had clawed through the land.

Then the 48th turned inland. The big fight now was to close the gap by cutting across country to Highway Six and cutting off the delaying forces of the German Army who were holding up through the Liri Valley to permit the rest of the Germans to escape.



Then came a series of fast moves for the 48th. From the 27th of May until the 5th of June, we moved six times. We spent three nights in the model town of Sabaudia in the heart of the Pontines. The first Americans that entered Sabaudia were Lieutenants Hammerstrom and Wamsley and their jeep driver, Pfc. Floyd Smith. The Italians went wild. They surrounded the jeep, decked it with flowers, shouted words of encouragement and threw kisses at them as they took off ahead. Sabaudia had been the favorite town of Mussolini, and the buildings were of modern design and fashionable taste. There was an excellent building with a huge theatre. Our Battalion Headquarters set up in an unfinished Naval Training School that was to rival Annapolis.

There was a quick stop in the mountain town of Sezze. It was perched on top of the flat peak of a mountain, and a long road wound around and around, until it finally reached the town at the top.

Our bombers had hit the town, and many of the houses were just piles of rubble in the streets. The people, like all of the Italians, were happy to see us, and for a while, we enjoyed the first fruits of victory—Italian white wine. We were nearing the wine country now. The Frascati Wineries just outside of Rome were famous throughout Europe for their blend of wines, made from grapes grown on the mountain terraces of the surrounding region.

Then came a quick move to the vicinity of Cori. We perched in an orchard on the slope of a hill as the 85th Division assembled in a defiladed railroad track to jump off during the night. We moved in with full equipment, and most of us slept under the stars without even digging a hole.

Most of us did not realize that we were so close to the front, but during the night, the Infantry moved into the valley below and began to move up the far mountainside against scattered opposition. The flares arched upward and outward and illuminated our entire bivouac area. We could plainly hear the sound of rifles and tommy-guns answered by burp guns and one stubborn German machinegun. There was the constant thud of hand grenades, and most of us lay awake and listened to the fire fight on the other slope.

During the night, we heard the uneven rumble of a German airplane. The plane circled the valley momentarily and then turned back. Suddenly he came in roaring low and a line of red dots moved slowly down the valley accompanied by the stutter of his machine guns. He was strafing the Infantry on the other side. He made another pass and worked the road leading up to our orchard. Back and forth he flew, plastering anything that moved.

We held our breath and hoped that he would not see the pile of heavy equipment that we carried or the trucks lined up beneath the trees. There were shouts and a continual banging noise as the machine gun bullets thudded into the vehicles on the road below. The plane made several more passes over the orchard and we wondered where our ack-ack was. The order must have been given, for suddenly the sky erupted as friendly ack-ack opened up on the plane. He wheeled and streaked off down the valley. By now it was almost dawn.

All three line companies worked to keep the road net leading to Velletri open. By June 2nd, Baker Company was hacking a road through the dense woods from a trail left by the 310th Engineers. The 85th Division left a jeep trail which the 48th widened to permit two-way traffic. The bulldozers moved forward relentlessly on the tail of the Infantry and the division Engineers, and the Baker Company dozers were within small arms range a great deal of the time. The road would carry the division traffic until Highway Six below Frascati and the lateral road-net was open.

Then the 48th reached Lariano and plunged through to Rocca Georgia. There we pulled out of the woods and headed for Frascati.

Headquarters bivouaced in a gas factory on the northern edge of town, and felt very vulnerable when a Jerry plane came around during the evening. The men scattered as the German plane passed over. It crossed into the town and dropped "butterfly" anti-personnel bombs. The bombs sounded like a rifle range. They are dropped in a single unit which explodes to throw the small bombs over a wide area.

Able Company received the cream of the assignments while at Frascati—to patrol and maintain the road from Frascati to Rome.

Meanwhile, Baker Company working near Frascati ran into a fire fight and bagged 67 German prisoners before they were finished.

The 48th was showing the effect of the past two week's contact with the retreating Wehrmacht. The companies had in excess of Table of Equipment, a German light tank, a doodle-bug and a volkswagen, among special gadgets of all types. But, we had paid the price for the march to the beachhead. An armored D-7 had

been hit by shellfire, and its accompanying prime mover was knocked out while supporting the 91st Recon. One of our six ton prime movers was hit by a mortar shell while repairing a culvert near Sezze, and a jeep and an R-4 bulldozer were knocked out. The gains more than balanced the loss. The 48th had been, very much, in the fight, and the success of the operations had made our equipment losses almost insignificant.

In one of the areas while on the drive to Rome there were some Jerry barracks and among them was a day room with a piano in it. Pfc. Spruce of Able Company was about the only one of the gang that could play it, so he would bang away on it in all his spare moments. We were only there about two days when the time came to move. There had grown an attachment between Spruce and the piano so it was decided by the members of the 1st platoon to load it on the truck and take it along. Nobody knew what they were getting into but that didn't make any difference because the men were determined to take it with them. There were some changes made in the carrying of the tool boxes so as to make room for the piano. It sounded like a travelling U.S.O. show when we moved with Spruce playing the piano and all of us singing. While Rome was falling, Spruce was banging away on the piano. The piano finally came to rest in a small church near Rome.

Baker Company tried to move up one night further along their road, but had to fall back on Able Company for the night. Captain Kincer sent back the message "Too much artillery." Baker Company was working hard, and the captain wanted to give his men a good night's sleep.

One of the most unpublicized and most essential jobs that the combat engineers do is clearing roads in an advance. Supplies must be quick to follow up an advance and the roads must be ready to receive the thousands of things that keep the army rolling.

When an army advances, another army must retreat, and even a well organized retreat will leave the roads littered with broken down equipment of all kinds. There are dead horses and men and trucks, ammunition, guns and rations scattered about in hopeless confusion. The engineers are the clean-up squad, they must make sure that there are no wires and charges attached to the equipment, and that there are no mines or demolitions left in the wake of the retreating force.

Bulldozers move up the road and sweep wrecked trucks, tanks and guns into roadside ditches, or tumble them off the road entirely. Men with mine detectors move up to sweep the road shoulders and ditches and peer into culverts and around bridges. Still other crews gather up bazookas, hand grenades and arms of all descriptions and blow them up to keep them out of the hands of hostile civilians or small groups of the enemy that have been by-passed. Other men run cables from jeeps or trucks and pull dead horses and wagons out of the way.

All this is necessary before the supplies can begin to roll up to hold the new ground that has been gained.

Sometimes it isn't an easy job. The Germans would mine their own dead and booby-trap their vehicles. Their retreat, too, would be covered by heavy artillery fire on the roads that the American armies were moving on, and many times the engineers would be working under fire.

But the booby-traps were one of the worst worries.

During the break-through of the Gustav Line in Italy, Able Company had the assignment of moving behind the Infantry, clearing debris off the road to Rome, where the American Army had won a large section of Highway Seven. Sergeant Valentine and his squad had cleared several vehicles and had just dragged a 75 mm cannon from the road about a hundred yards into a field nearby. After all the debris had been cleared, the men began to inspect the vehicles and the guns for booby-traps. While several men were around the gun, a large charge was set off inside the barrel. The whole squad was knocked to the ground by the concussion; at the same particular moment, General Mark Clark happened to be passing up the road nearby. It was some time before the groggy men could realize what had happened and come to the aid of Pfc. Mahon and Private Axler, who had been wounded by the shrapnel. The men began to rip out their bandages and call for the medics. General Clark noticed the excitement, stopped his jeep and came over to the squad. As the men were preparing to evacuate the wounded engineers, the General walked over and said, "You must be calm at times like this. These things are to be expected."

War Correspondents gathered around as General Clark spoke to the wounded men, and the next morning the newspapers' headlines read, "General Mark Clark Narrowly Escapes Injury In Frontline Visit"!

Water was a major problem while pushing through the woods. Sergeant Smith and his four water purification units were being constantly rushed. There were a lot of outfits moving up, and many were drawing



later from his point leader that the hole was dry. Then he would have to go looking again.

With so many moves, his points were strung out all along the path of our advance, and he could not remove points in the rear until he had given notice to the units that the points were serving. There were too few engineers and not enough water for all of the combat units moving across to Highway Six from the beach-head area. For the space of a week, Sergeant Smith and his men worked and worried until the forward elements broke through to the important wine town of Frascati. Then the Army didn't need water anyway.

On June 2nd, higher headquarters requested from the 48th, "One enlisted man, grade immaterial to volunteer for a hazardous mission. The man finally selected from those volunteers must be able to take care of himself and be desiring of honor and recognition which would probably result from the mission." Later we learned that these men, each from a combat unit, would be given the task of stopping the Germans from blowing bridges and would be the first to enter Rome. This was done so that no unit could claim itself as the first to enter Rome. Thus, all could share equally in the victory. Staff Sergeant Reeves from Baker Company was chosen from among all of the volunteers.

Before starting our spring drive for Rome, Colonel Swift had assembled the Battalion, and he told us that in this new offensive we would face a foe which might well prove even more destructive than the Germans. That foe was malaria. Past history had brought out the fact that a number of armies besieging Rome were defeated by malaria. This disease had shattered Caesar's army in the Roman Civil War. The Gauls under Brennus were so weakened by this disease that they fled in disorder. In the 12th Century, Frederick Barba-rossa's army failed to take Rome because of malaria.

Our drive to Rome soon bore out Colonel Swift's statements. The Pontine Marshes were the most clement breeding grounds for the Anopholes mosquito. We attempted to outsmart them. We smeared repellent over ourselves, we wore headnets, we suffered the heat under mosquito bars and we forced the bitter pills of atabrine into our system. Yet malaria caused more casualties on our drive for Rome than did battle casualties. We had 49 individuals downed by it.

It was June 4th when the colonel received orders to press a recon to the outskirts of Rome. The following morning several recon parties prepared to push the recon along all of the routes, and Sergeant Gustavson and Sergeant Fialkowski were told to get a look at the bridges over the Tiber and examine them for emplaced demolition.



INVASION TRAINING

Rome was a carnival city when the 48th passed through on Liberation Day. The streets were mobbed with throngs of people pressed twenty deep, who engulfed the convoys and brought the vehicles to a dead stop. They were screaming, "Viva Americanos," waving flags, and trying to catch the soldiers hands and pull them out of their trucks and jeeps. There wasn't anything the men could do. They were caught in the celebration and couldn't move.

People engulfed the tiny jeeps and grabbed at the officers and men and waved flags and bottles in their faces. It was only by brute force that the convoy started moving, even then, the crowd would surge around and through the moving vehicles cheering and yelling as they moved through town.

The first visit to Rome astounded the G.I.s. Somehow they couldn't comprehend that this town wasn't like any other in the whole of Italy. The buildings were standing and the people were well dressed. The stores were open and there were bars and hotels with red-cushioned chairs and movies that were playing three shows a day.

The apartments were the greatest thing in Rome. There were rows of them, blocks of them, and even miles of great modernistic apartment buildings, towering six and even seven stories above the streets and giving the city a massive appearance.

The women were wearing silk stockings and make up, and their gay summer dresses gave the city streets a metropolitan atmosphere.

Shortly after, Rome was turned over to the Third Division and the 48th Engineers. The Third was getting its reward from the Fifth Army for their magnificent fighting which broke the German hold on the Anzio beachhead, and the 48th its reward for the aggressive reconnaissance in the Pontines which didn't give the Germans time to blow bridges and canals.

To MPs in the town, the magic password was, "Third Division, Bud" or "48th Engineers." This was a pass, signed and sealed, that would let us go unmolested.

At first we wanted only to see the town. We wanted to see streets with lights, stores with window displays, and pretty girls in sun glasses. Later, we wanted to see the Colliseum, St. Peter's Cathedral and the Vatican.

The first day, the prices were low, but the second or third, the prices had skyrocketed. By the fourth day, they were impossible, and the GIs just walked around to find a chummy bar and stayed out of the broiling sun.

The Tiber River Park was popular. There the long lines of trees protected men from the sun, and the men would sit on the benches and watch the city and wonder.

Some of the men found an amusement park complete with a merry-go-round, scenic railways, and other familiar carnival concessions. At night, the park was a fairyland of colored lights, and men of the 48th would go dashing about with fistfuls of tickets like kids on a holiday.

Rome was almost a little piece of the States. There were enough buildings to give it a big town appearance and enough amusement to keep most of the men interested.

All were amazed by the Colliseum, awed by the magnificence of St. Peter's and thrilled by the loveliness of the Roman women. But most of all, they were thankful that this was finally Rome and not Naples or



At Last!

Caserta. This war was getting someplace now. There were some nice towns up here. They looked forward to Milan and Venice, the north of Italy and the industrial section of the country.

Colonel Swift ordered Captain Snyder to follow the 85th Division through Rome and maintain recon to the front lines. Sgt. Gustafson and Sgt. Fialkowski were sent to check on all roads and bridges in the Rome area. The important bridges across the Tiber were left intact in the open city, and one railroad bridge was damaged in the immediate vicinity.

But Captain Snyder went to work too enthusiastically. On the following day, the 48th received the sarcastic message from Captain Bowser of 1108th Group, "Doing a great job in the 88th Division sector. The 19th Engineers thank you. Your roads are in the 85th Division sector." After working with the 88th Division through Rome, the 48th was trying to help them again. Our trucks were being used to haul the doughboys ahead. The front had moved so fast through Rome, that the doughboys had been left far in the rear.

Baker and Charlie Companies drew assignments on the 85th Division Main Supply Road leading northward from Rome to the small town of Monterose. The Air Corps had swept down on the retreating German convoys just outside of Rome, and carnage was horrible. The dive bombers had dropped one bomb in front of the convoy, and another in the rear. The two craters held the convoy on the road. Then the planes swept up and down along a five mile stretch jammed with men, horses and equipment. The road was one vast tangle of dead horses and men and burning trucks and cars. The 48th bulldozers rolled up the road and buried their noses into the tangled steel. The trucks were pushed or shoved off the road, and the big guns were toppled over off to the side. Cables were fastened around jeeps and dead horses were pulled into the fields. Bulldozers dipped their blades into the grass and dug long trenches in which the animals were buried.

On the seventh of May, Lieutenant Moritz and the recon penetrated to Monterose through the tangled mass of destroyed equipment on the road. Lt. Moritz said, "I counted two hundred destroyed trucks and cars along that stretch. That wasn't all. I stopped counting before we were half way through. There were many more."

The 48th CP moved from the Bank of Rome building at the southern outskirts of Rome to the Ministry of Propaganda at the northern end, adjacent to the Mussolini Forum. Propaganda must have been working 24 hours a day during the reign of Mussolini from the appearance of the Ministry. Literally tons and tons of leaflets and little facist flags were piled high in the rooms, and there were endless photographs of pretty girls doing Roman calisthenics. It was small wonder that the Italians had been so successfully duped.

On the twelfth of June, we were relieved from II Corps to rest. We had been only 27 days in action from Minturno break-through to Rome. Charlie Company had built a sixty foot Bailey at Monterose, and Baker Company replaced it with a wooden trestle by the time we were to be withdrawn from the Corps.

The 48th pulled out of the Corps and the companies moved along the road from Rome. A lot of us had another chance to take a closer look at Rome for the few days that we remained in the vicinity of the city. The city had been untouched by war except for a few bombs that had plastered the railroad station. The most remarkable building there, to many of us, was St. Peter's Cathedral. The Cathedral was constantly filled with GI sightseers. On entering, it did not strike us as being so large, but after several steps, we realized that the building was immense. Beautiful marble had been taken from Pagan Temples and brought from all over the world to give the interior a rich glow. Many famous paintings adorned the walls and the central dome. Statues of kings and prophets were pedestaled in the alcoves throughout the building. Four pillars from King Solomon's Temple were in the center of the Cathedral to make a square.

Everything was so artistically arranged and so beautiful that we came again and again just to stand in the Church.

Many of us went for gaiety; we walked along the Tiber River Parkway arm in arm with a bella signorina. The women were unusually friendly. Many of them were attractive, black haired, olive-skinned, with a form like a pin-up girl. We strolled the boulevards with them and had small flirtations. It was a pleasant relief to forget soldiering for the moment.

We began to send billeting parties to find a bivouac for rest and training. Finally, a party reported that Lake Bracciano, north of Rome, supported an excellent wooded grove with open fields for baseball and touch football. Another party reported an excellent spot along the ocean where we could bathe and loaf

along the beach near the city of Civitavecchia. We pondered about which spot to take, until another bivouac party reported the spot near the ocean also contained a minefield several hundred yards long. We decided to take the lake. Soon on the 17th of June, the 48th passed down Highway Two past Monterosso and on northward to Lake Bracciano. We looked at the beautiful lake, the sloping green shores, the tiny boats around the small town and the blue sky overhead, and decided this was really it.

The Engineers have a special way of fishing. They are an impatient lot, and unusually hungry. With the typical American custom of not wasting time, they like to get the job done. Fishing is a means of adding to the larder of spam and powdered eggs, and the companies, whenever they camped near a stream, usually had several parties with business ideas.

The men take a half pound block of TNT, a non electric cap and about eight inches of time fuze. This combination is guaranteed to produce results, if there are fish anywhere in the vicinity.

We were getting ready to enjoy a real vacation. The men went looking for boats, and a bulldozer began to hack a baseball field out of a cow pasture. Our bivouac was peaceful and secluded. The war had passed us by and traveled with a rush far up the boot of Italy. We were happy.

Suddenly, the operations Section began to travel on mysterious errands. We pumped them, but they wouldn't say anything. Then came a rumor that we established as fact. We were going back to Naples. The 48th Engineers had been attached to the Third Division and were to join the Seventh Army.

Actually, the 48th was not scheduled to become part of the Seventh Army; II Corps was ordered to transfer one Combat Engineer Battalion to the Seventh Army. At that particular time, II Corps had the 19th Engineers and the 1108th Group, consisting of the 235th and the 48th Engineers. General Keyes had it so arranged that the 48th would remain with II Corps but the orders were reversed by mistake. The final order came down from Corps that the 48th was to go to the Seventh Army. By the time the mistake was found, the 48th was already on its way to report.

Our departure from old II Corps was not unnoticed. Major General Geoffrey Keyes sent a letter addressed to the officers and men of the 48th. "I have noticed with sincere regret, the departure of the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion from the ranks of II Corps."

"Your Service for this Corps was exemplary. The outstanding success of this Corps during the recent operation was due almost entirely to the splendid manner in which you, who composed it, labored and fought as individuals and as a team."

"For myself, as your recent commander, and in behalf of the nation we serve, I want to express to each of you, a deep and sincere appreciation of your courage, fortitude, and sacrifice, and a heartfelt wish that success and victory will follow your every future engagement and enterprise."

At 0700, June 20th we had started back towards Naples. We were now veterans of three campaigns, the Crossing of the Volturno, The Italian Winter Line, and the Drive to Rome. It had taken us eight and one half months to reach our bivouac north of Rome, but we were able to make the convoy back to where we started in one day with time to spare. The distance we had traveled under peaceful conditions in one hour took us an average of 61,200 hours to travel when the ground was in dispute with the Germans. Even the names of the towns through which we passed were more than just towns. Each was a separate epic of the hard war which had won this ground.

We cleared the IP across the Tiber River, passed through Rome, and then proceeded down Highway seven through Velletri, Cisterna, Terracina, Fondi, Itri, Formia, Scauri, and across the Garigliano River. Then we turned off on Highway 714 for lunch. After chow of "K" rations, we continued through Mondragone, Cancello and Villalitterno to our final destination just outside the small town of Qualiano.

The companies found spots among shady groves of hickory trees and pitched their pup tents before dark. We did not know what our part in the operation would be or even what the operation was. But we began a training program to keep us in shape until we did find out what it was all about.

For ten days we sweated out routine training such as a five mile hike in an hour each day and training in machine gun, rifle practice and scouting and patrolling. While training in rifle grenades, Lieutenant O'Leary

and Pfc. Sage from Baker Company were hospitalized when a grenade exploded prematurely on a carbine. Lieutenant O'Leary died in the hospital during the night.

On the evening of the 26th of June, a 20th Special Service outfit entertained us, spotlighted by Ann, a sweet, blushing Red Cross girl, who sang to the GIs. Most of the men knew Ann from the Naples Red Cross, and the rumor about the outfit was that Ann would never date an officer. This made Ann immensely popular, for a Red Cross girl who did not like officers was a rare, welcome novelty. Ann had such a sentimental voice that the engineers requested song after song. After the show, Ann confessed to some of the men that she liked the 48th Engineers far more than the 48th liked her.

We were getting passes once more to Naples, and the men dashed into town to visit old friends. We laughed and joked and called each other "PBS". This was the furthest the 48th had ever been behind the fighting front. Naples was still the same old town, and it carried the same allure of a big city to the men of the 48th. We compared it with Rome, and decided that Rome was a better pass town, but we knew Naples, and it was sort of coming back to a place that we had left long ago. A little like coming home.

On June 30th, we became attached to the 40th Engineer Regiment as an Engineer Shore Battalion and were directed to report to the Invasion Training Center. At 0800, we moved to Battapaglia about twenty miles south of Salerno to practice for an invasion. We had not the slightest notion of where the invasion would be, and the rumors began to roll. First it was northern Italy, where we would cut across the plain from Bologna. Then we decided that it would be Yugoslavia, mostly because the "Stars and Stripes" was carrying lots of feature stories about the fighting there. Perhaps it was Greece, and we would cut up to meet Marshall Tito. The Canadians did it in the last war, we remembered. It might be that we would go to England to make an invasion along France somewhere. France was a good bet.

A few of us thought that it was a dry run to keep the Germans guessing. These men sat idly by with a complacent look. A few deluded men reasoned that we were going back to America after all, we had done all of the fighting so far. What had ever happened to the millions of men there? They could not all be in this new invasion of France. The invasion of France had begun the morning after Rome fell, and we had optimistically waited for the Germans to ask for Armistice daily. We were through with this war now. In another month, when the new armies in France got going, it would be all over. We might even be training for Japan.

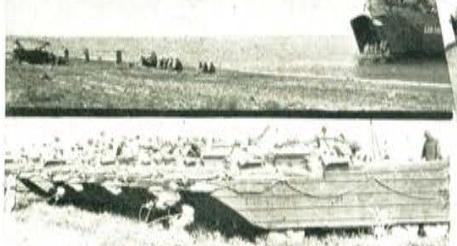
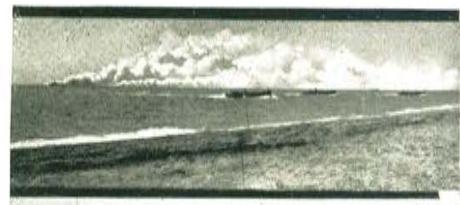
One lady knew where we were going. Her name was affectionately known as "Berlin Sally," and she spoke constantly to the GIs in Italy. Usually, she had better recordings than our own radio, and she would tell an off-colored joke for the men once in a while. Mostly, it was the voice of a woman speaking English that got us. The winter up at Cassino had made us fast friends, and listening to Sally was a popular pastime ever since. Sally seemed to think we were going to France. We weighed her words along with our buddies and worked out our own separate ideas.

Our bivouac in Battapaglia was a plum orchard, and the ripe fruit dangled above our pup tents. We ate plums constantly. Cucumbers and tomatoes were also in season. We had been weaned away from these delicacies.



The Road Back

INVASION TRAINING



cies for a long time with our powdered eggs diet. Fresh eggs were plentiful, too, and often we had egg, tomato and cucumber sandwiches with a handful of plums for dessert.

Just a hundred yards south of our camp bivouac there was an irrigation canal, and during the hot July days, we took time out every day to swim and cool off in the refreshing water. A total of 204 men in the Battalion did not know how to swim, so to rectify this badfeature of a future Shore Engineer outfit, a swimming program, under the direction of instructors, was organized, and enforced swimming became an integral part of our training program.

The job ahead was to change from Combat Engineers to Shore Engineers. Specialized units had spent years in training for an amphibious landing. This is considered to be the most complex of all military operations, and will make any general lose a couple of grey hairs. The Engineer part is one of the most important, for the beach depends on the Engineer battalion which makes it. The Engineers must get the beach into shape for the Infantry and combat vehicles to pass over it.

The stores and supplies must be brought in at just the right moment, and the underwater mines and obstacles must be cleared so that the landing boats can make the beach. All of this is an Engineer responsibility, and the whole complex operation will depend on the ability of the Engineers to work while the enemy lays down a curtain of fire on the vulnerable beach.

Two days after arriving at Battapaglia we became detached from the 40th Engineers and became attached to the 540th Engineers. Then began a short tense period of specialist schooling, acetylene welding, bulldozers, graders, cranes, swimming, demolition of underwater obstacles, debarkation, water proofing, and Dukw operators. The companies began to lay out beaches on dry land and each man was taught the job of several others as well as his own particular job. Some men would sweep the beach for mines, and others would quickly lay the summerfelt matting, to let the first tanks get across the shifting sand of the beach. Other men would set up defenses at the dune line. We began to understand the term "Waves". The first wave of the Engineers shore battalion went in with the first wave of the Infantry. They were to reconnoitre and contact the mine detecting party that followed. Then came the wave of the heavy weapons platoon with their machine guns who would outpost the dune line and protect their working parties under small arms fire. More and more waves came in with men for special tasks. Each wave had its task team who specialized in their job, and timed so that the others would prepare the way for them. The recon team would locate a place for the summerfelt matting, and the mine detectors would begin to sweep. Then the matting team would begin to lay the mat, and the first tanks would be timed to come in at the exact spot where the mines had been cleared and the matting laid. It was all precision and clockwork and it demanded instantaneous work by the Engineers. We had two weeks to learn all of this.

Then we participated in a "Dry Run" invasion with the 36th and the 45th Divisions. On July 18th we took off in LCTs and other landing craft to a rendevous off shore. The following morning a heavy rocket barrage was concentrated, and the assault Infantry hit the beach under the cover of protective smoke, and made their way up to the dune line. The 48th came after, marking out the beach, sweeping for mines, laying out dumps and performing the hundreds of other tasks required of Shore Engineers.

Meanwhile, signal troops of the 74th Signal Company, and a detachment of 504th Military Police, and sailors from the Eighth Naval Beach Battalion joined Task Force 48. The detachment commanders and the company commanders of the 48th as well as the staff officers gathered on the grass at 1800 for a round table discussion of the problem. During the meeting, Colonel Swift gave the first hint of what was to come. "Our first mission," the colonel explained. "Will be to lay out dumps, build roads, and dig pits for ammunition dumps.. The second mission of the Battalion is to clean up a town. A 110 foot Bailey Bridge will probably be needed. Most of this work will possibly have to be done fast under fire. All of the men of the Battalion are to have their dog tags inspected twice weekly until movement for the operation and their pay books are to be in order. Officers and men are to print their name, rank, and serial number inside their combat shoe tops. All first aid packets are to be examined for sulfadiazine tablets." The 48th appeared to be in for a rough time. The time for playing was over. Apparently, the colonel knew where we were going, but wasn't talking. The meeting broke up soberly, and the commanders made their way back to their units.

The last bit of training at Battapaglia was a trial run through the gas chamber. Able Company's pet sheep, Buck, made the chamber easily in his mask. But he was in a rush to get out. The men of Able Company apparently intended to take Buck along to the beach.



The 48th was a Beach Force in itself now. There were sailors, signalmen, MPs, and Naval officers with us. The Navy was to guide us in and supply us with screening smoke. The Engineers were to layout the beach, and the MPs were to keep things moving across it. The signal tied us all in, and made us a working team.

The last few days of July and the first few days of August were anxious ones for we knew that we were to leave soon for an invasion somewhere. The time was getting short. Naples, Salerno, and Pouzzouli, and all along the coast line, boat after boat could be seen. The magnitude of this operation struck us. We knew that the landing was to be three divisions abreast. Even the much publicized landing in Northern France had only been two divisions abreast. We completed details such as waterproofing vehicles so that they could bounce through the open mouths of LST's and churn through water up to the drivers' necks. Our gasmasks were sealed and waterproofed, or we drew assault masks in rubber casings. Each one of us was issued a small bottle of atabrine, and a small American flag armband to prove that we were GIs so that we would not be shot by mistake.

A beach control band with the letters "SP" gave us permission to move freely about the beach. A vomit bag M-1 made our equipment complete.

On D-Day, the Seventh Army was to assault the southern coast of France to seize the ports of Toulon and Marseilles. VI Corps and the Eight Amphibious Force were to make a daylight assault on beaches from Cap Cavalaire to Agay employing three divisions abreast. The Provincial Airborne were to drop at 0430 to seize Le Muy. Gliders were to land at 0800 and at 1800 D-Day.

The 48th Engineers were to be the Shore Battalion for the 142 Infantry Regiment of the 36th Division. The 36th was to assault Green and Red Beaches at H-Hour on D-Day, seizing Agay, St. Raphael, Frejus, and Le Muy, making contact with the airborne troops. Green and Red Beaches were to be put in operation by the 540th Engineer Beach Group with the 48th acting as their third battalion. Our orders were to land on Red Beach and operate the beach if ordered. Otherwise, we were to open the Coast Highway 98 into St. Raphael. At the earliest possible time, we were to replace a bridge over the Valesoure River, which would probably be destroyed. Some of the other tasks outlined were to provide access to the small boat harbor at St. Raphael, and delouse the port area of mines, and initiate port reconstruction. We were to provide traffic routes to and within the Red Beach dump areas, and accomplish work in bunker destruction, and fire fighting within Red Beach areas. This was the plan if everything went according to Hoyle — — — but as usual in the Army, things did not go according to plan. Red Beach of the 142nd became famous as the one beach in the entire operation where the Germans offered resistance.



CHAPTER XVIII

ZERO HOUR AT RED BEACH

Reveille sounded at 0300 on August 10th for Baker Company and elements of H&S Company. We headed down the dirt road from our bivouac in the trees for the last time. We turned the corner with full packs and headed towards a small clearing a mile down the road. Lines of quartermaster trucks were waiting for us, and we peeled off and scrambled into the trucks with our full packs and equipment.

The trucks filed out and we passed quickly through the early dawn toward the metropolis of Naples. The city smelled almost clean as we moved through to the dock area.

There were hundreds of trucks moving toward the same destination, and we waited silently as thousands of last minute details were worked out.

A couple of Red Cross girls were handing out doughnuts and lemonade when the silent column of men marched to the pier on the quay in Naples. We juggled our armfuls of equipment as we took their offerings quietly. The harbor was packed with ships of all kinds. There were sluggish little barges, square LSTs, tiny LCIs and huge Army troopships. All were bustling with activity as cranes moved equipment on to the larger vessels and the small ones were rapidly filled with troops and equipment.

Then our column started forward. We crossed a floating ramp two by two with the men of the 142nd Infantry. Our minds were a blank now. There wasn't much to think about. We were numb from weeks of thinking and guessing and working out rumors and worrying about what Sally said from Berlin.

"I don't know why you boys of the 45th the 3rd and the 36th are taking off your patches. We know who you are and where you are going. That is more than you know. But don't worry. We will be there waiting for you to give you a warm welcome."

Sally was partially right. We didn't know where we were going, but like Sally, we could guess fairly accurately.

The ship filled up leisurely as the long column of troops filed aboard. Most of the vehicles were already stored in the hold, the rest would come later. Everything in the huge machine of an amphibious operation was being put aboard. Now all that was needed was the men to fill it out. All day they came to the harbor in long lines of dusty trucks. They received their two doughnuts and followed along the wooden ramps until they, too, were packed somewhere on the huge fleet of ships.

Towards dusk, the USMT Nightengale with elements of H&S and Baker Companies pulled away from the dock and headed down the coast. Able and Charlie Companies boarded the LST 5004 (HMS Karen) and a few of the men boarded the LST 1012, and moved to join the convoy. The ships continued to join, until during the night, hundreds of ships were lying off Terra Anunziata and Castlemarre, within sight of Pompeii and Mt. Vesuvius.

To be aboard a ship bound for an early wave in an invasion is no pleasant thought. There was no singing aboard the Nightengale. One group started, but it soon died down. We were glad in a way to be leaving Italy, and most of us thought that this invasion would mark a big thing. This was one big step nearer the end of the war. This would be the last tough one for us.

The song of the Nightengale soon had us all smiling as the loud speaker system kept insisting, "Sweepers, sweepers, man your brooms" or "on deck second watch, on deck second watch. Second watch relieve the watch".

Early in the morning, the ship began to vibrate. We moved out on deck to watch Pouzzuli and Naples move by for the last time. Then there was nothing but water. Other ships moved into join the line and soon there was a formation of troships, much like the Nightengale, carefully herded by destroyers and destroyer escorts. The small naval escorts hung low in the water and disappeared over the horizon throughout the day on little details of their own.

We plowed northward all through the day. The men began to accept the fact that they were actually there now and they were on their way. There was no turning back. This was it. As soon as the men began to realize this, they loosened up. There were a few card games started, but most of the men formed little "bull sessions". Sometimes the main topic was the invasion, but lots of times it would drift off about the women of Rome or the wine of Naples, or some strange stories about the fight through the line. Most of the men of the 36th had trained during the whole drive, and they were eager to listen to the Engineer stories of Rome and the drive north.

The men of the 36th had a whole new crop of stories about Naples. We could drop into any group and talk. We were all on the same job, and it made us all friends.

The next day Corsica swept by and Sardinia. We knew with some sort of resignation where we were headed now.

Then it broke — Southern France! But it was no surprise now, it was just a confirmation. Maps were handed about. We were to hit Red Beach with the men of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division who were aboard with us. There were mines in the water at Red Beach and mines on the shore. There was a seaplane landing pier at one end and Hotel Conspicuous at the other. There were guns on the hills and wire in the town and there were crack troops there to meet us.

There were two hours of attack. At H Hour the 141st and the 143rd Infantry Regiments were to land on the flanks and envelope the town of St. Raphael by taking the high ground in back. H Hour was late in the morning — eight o'clock. At two in the afternoon the 142nd was to smack the town head-on.

Rough? It was rugged!

D-Day broke dull and gray. The long grey line of ships drifted on a mirror-like stillness of grey water. The low grey shore line of Southern France reached for long grey streamers of clouds off in the haze. Now and then a battleship would envelop itself in smoke, and minutes after, the dull boom of its guns would echo across the water to us. A parade of aircraft marched across the sky, wheeled, and marched back again.

Little LCIs with banks of rockets covering their decks moved up, and tiny LCVPs skittered in hopeless little circles in the rear of the big transports, waiting for company. Then they formed a skirmish line and rushed for the distant beaches. We couldn't see the boats. They were too low in the water, but we could follow the white spume in each boat's wake as they hulled down with throttles wide open.



Beachhead!

Then there was nothing to do but wait. Reports and rumors trickled in. "It's strangely easy and it is rough. There are plenty of Jerries there and there are none. The 45th is pinned on the beach and they are ten miles in and still going."

Then it was two o'clock — — — Z-Hour.

Our own LCVPs were swung out and down while we watched, mostly in silence, but with scattered attempts at humor, as the men climbed in. Then it was us. Over the cargo net we went, hand over hand, with our rifles swinging awkwardly up and down our arms. We checked our packs and equipment nervously for the hundredth time as the boat moved out to get in formation with others already in the water.

But something was wrong. We cut our motors and lay dead in the water among all kinds of landing craft. Then we saw the reason. Accurate 88 fire walked up and down the beach approaches. Sand and water bounced upward, reaching for the boats waiting to go in. At 1400 hours a message was radioed that Red Beach had not been taken. For two hours we drifted around in the water; the Jerries were throwing a number of shells into the bay and on to the beach.

The first wave waited for the second and the second for the third. Minutes became hours but the shelling continued.

Finally, late in the afternoon, the shipmaster hollered, "Duck your heads, we are going in." We were going into Green Beach, already consolidated by the 141st Infantry.

Baker Company got its feet wet going in, but practically everyone else walked off on to the beach. We scrambled about two hundred yards up the beach and moved through a tank barrage along the coastal road to Hotel Les Roches Rouges. The noise along the way was deafening; the tankers were feeding their guns in rapid succession.

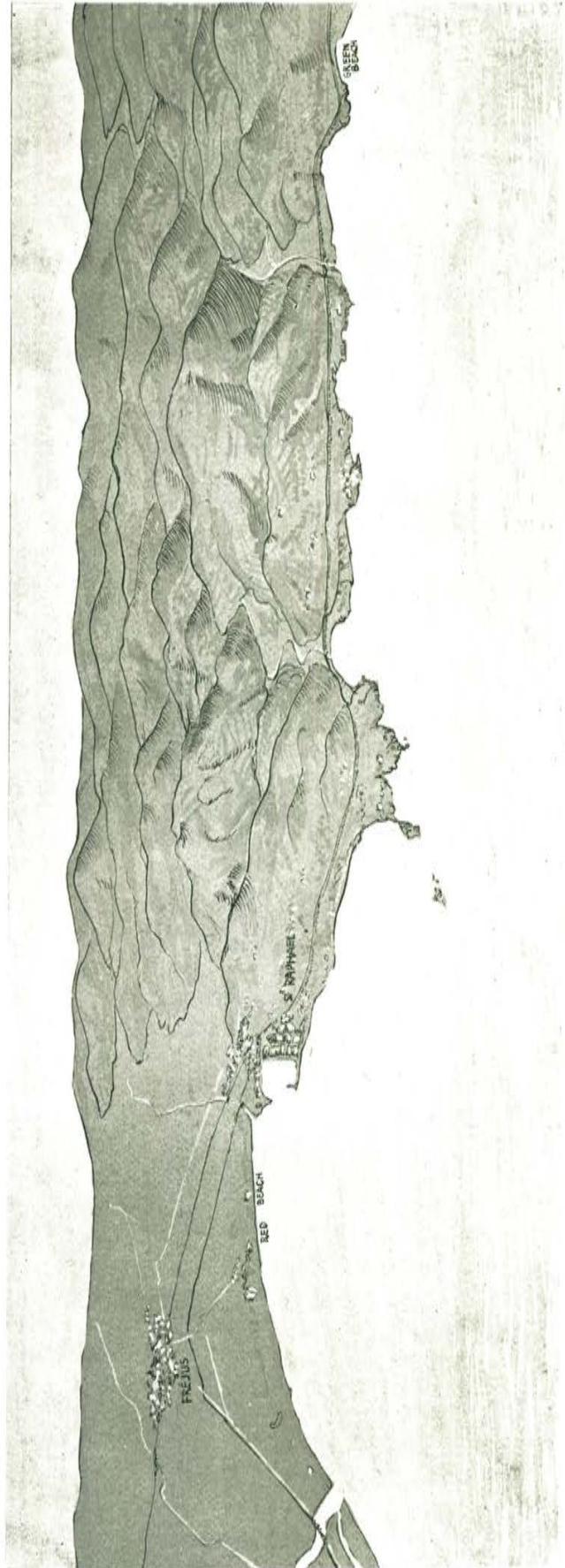
Then, for the first time, the 48th realized what a tough landing Red Beach would have been. There were hundreds of mines on the beach along with pillboxes covering the open sand. Then there was wire in the town and underwater obstacles out in the water.

The 48th had planned to knock out the underwater obstacles in a novel way. They had sent the following men to a navy school in Salerno: 1st Lt. Peternel, T/4 Lauschner, Pfc. Schwartz, Pvt. Currier, Pfc. Finn, T/5 Tate, Pvt. Piaizza, Cpl. Malon, T/5 Roetter, Pfc. Builder, Pvt. Marony, Pvt. Ewell, Pvt. Hamelin, Pvt. Scatta, Pvt. Curran, Pfc. Nash, Pvt. Mitchell, Pvt. Lamb, Pvt. Dunn, T/5 Nedrick and Sgt. Torigian. These men were formed into demolition teams of sailors and men of the 48th. Each team was to get small boats loaded with tons of explosives into the beach defenses. Then the small boats were to be blown up.

The men spent two weeks in underwater demolition school at Salerno preparing for the job. They were taught how to prepare heavy satchel charges of explosives. The explosive boats were completely controlled by radio, and would be exploded when they hit the beach.

Here is the story of one of the three groups of volunteers. Sergeant Nedrick of Charlie Company, one of the volunteers for the hazardous mission described the early action off Red Beach. "The night before we were to go into action, we were sitting on the deck of the LCP boat talking over the strange job that was before us. Some of the navy men with us had never seen action before, and one of them was particularly anxious to make the landing. 'No matter how tough this thing may be,' he said, 'I'm going to set foot on French soil and get some souvenirs out of this war.' Private Curran looked up and said quietly, 'With all of the stuff that Jerry throws at you, you will probably forget about that.' So we sweated it out until the morning of August 15th. Z-Hour for Red Beach was not until the afternoon, so early in the morning, the crew went down to the LCP boats and made ready for the take-off. When we tried to start the boats, the one with Sergeant Torigian aboard would not start. Another one wouldn't start either. We were having all sorts of trouble and the same thought was running through our minds. This thing looked bad from the beginning and now it was getting worse."

"Just then the bombardment from the battleships and destroyers started. Pvt. Lamb shouted above the noise, 'The invasion is on.' He didn't have to tell us, though. The noise was terrific. We were in close now, and we could see the town of St. Raphael clearly. Everything was still as we moved in. The mechanics had been working on the smaller boats below and had them ready now. Any minute we would begin to let them out. Suddenly, the Germans opened up on us with mortars and machine guns. That was a big surprise to us, and for a moment, everyone lost his head. Shells were bursting all around us. There were plenty of Jerries at our beach, and we knew our job was going to be a tough one. We kept moving in by taking a zig-zag



course while the Germans continued to fire away at us. Our radio-controlled boats were slipped out and they moved along fine. We directed one of them into the beach at the exact spot where we wanted it to go. Then we exploded it and turned around. We were shaken by the explosions and the shells that came in close, but no one was hurt. We had gotten to within a half mile of the enemy held beach.

After the boat was exploded, the fleet raked the beach with 20 millimeter cannons to explode mines and some of our planes strafed and bombed the beach.

Then we started out with two more radio boats. This time we went even closer to the beach. The artillery and machine guns were worse than before. We directed one of our boats in all right, but it did not explode. The other boat got out of control and began to swing around in circles. It was about all we could do to stay out of its way. The shells were getting closer and closer. The shells were so close, that all of us except the skipper of the boat lay flat on the deck to avoid getting hit with shrapnel. All of a sudden, our other radio-controlled boat started heading for a destroyer. We could get out of the way, but the destroyer was too big. It couldn't move fast enough, and tons of explosives headed at you on a speedboat is something to worry about."

"The destroyer opened up on the boat with a twenty millimeter cannon but the boat kept coming. The destroyer wheeled around its three inch gun and sank the boat with one shot."

"Meanwhile, shells were still coming in at us. One hit about two yards away from our boat, but it was a dud. During the barrage, Sergeant Torigian tried to jump from one boat to another as we passed but he lost his balance and fell in the water. We moved over to him and almost stopped the boat, as we threw him a rope. We dragged him out, and a naval officer yelled to the driver to get out of range of that artillery. Just as we were picking up speed, five shells came in. One hit where we had just been and two more bracketed the little boat. One of the Navy men yelled 'I'm hit!'. Private Curran ripped out his first aid packet and bandaged the man's head. There was no hospital ship near-by, so we ran out to one of the destroyers.

We met the first wave of Infantry moving in to Red Beach as we neared the destroyer. They were so badly shelled that they had to return to their starting point. We were turned in to Green Beach later in the day and joined Charlie Company which had already landed."

We had no sooner reached the hotel, when three planes flying high, passed over the mountain and dipped toward the fleet off-shore. There was a split second of silence, and then as if by pre-decision command every anti-aircraft gun aboard the invasion fleet and many guns on shore began to fire. The night was filled with the clatter of ack-ack, and the sky was etched with red balls drifting slowly upward.

Two of the planes wheeled, and moved back, but one continued parallel to the beach. Suddenly a red streak detached itself from the plane and nosed downward. There were shouts of "He's hit, he's hit" from the men, but the streak nosed over gently to Green Beach where we had just came in. Suddenly there was an ugly red flash and a loud explosion. An LST carrying guns, men and ammunition of the 36th Division was hit. The sky flared as the ammunition began to explode. Up on the hillside we could see the flame glow intense and then fade, only to sweep upward again as the flames found the powder.

We worried about the fire for a while, thinking that it would draw the enemy aircraft, for now they had a beacon right on the beach that they couldn't miss. But apparently, the Germans just didn't have the planes or the time to prepare a strike at the beach.

The next morning, word came that St. Raphael had not been taken. The original invasion plan called for the 143rd and the 141st Regimental Combat teams to sweep in from the flanks and take the high ground behind the town by two in the afternoon, on D-Day. Then the 142nd with the 48th were to hit Red Beach in a direct frontal assault on the town.

But the fire on the beach was so severe that the 142nd was turned into Green Beach, which had been taken earlier. The 143rd had assembled during the night, and were going to move through Frejus to outflank St. Raphael on the morning of the 16th of August.

The Colonel was anxious to be moving. The 48th had a lot of work to do, and there was no time to be lost. He called Lieutenant Finnegan, Battalion S-2, and the Reconnaissance Section to him. "Get into St. Raphael and find a CP", he told them.

At the same time, Sergeant Smukler was told, "Infiltrate into town and get Operations ready to move."

Lieutenant Finnegan and his recon moved out, followed shortly by Sergeant Smukler, Corporal Saraniero and Private Wynkoop.

The Operations men were picked up by an Infantry Jeep and passed quickly through Agay and along the coastal road until a Military Policeman halted them.

"You can't get through up there," he said, "The town isn't taken and there is a pillbox on the road that is holding things up."

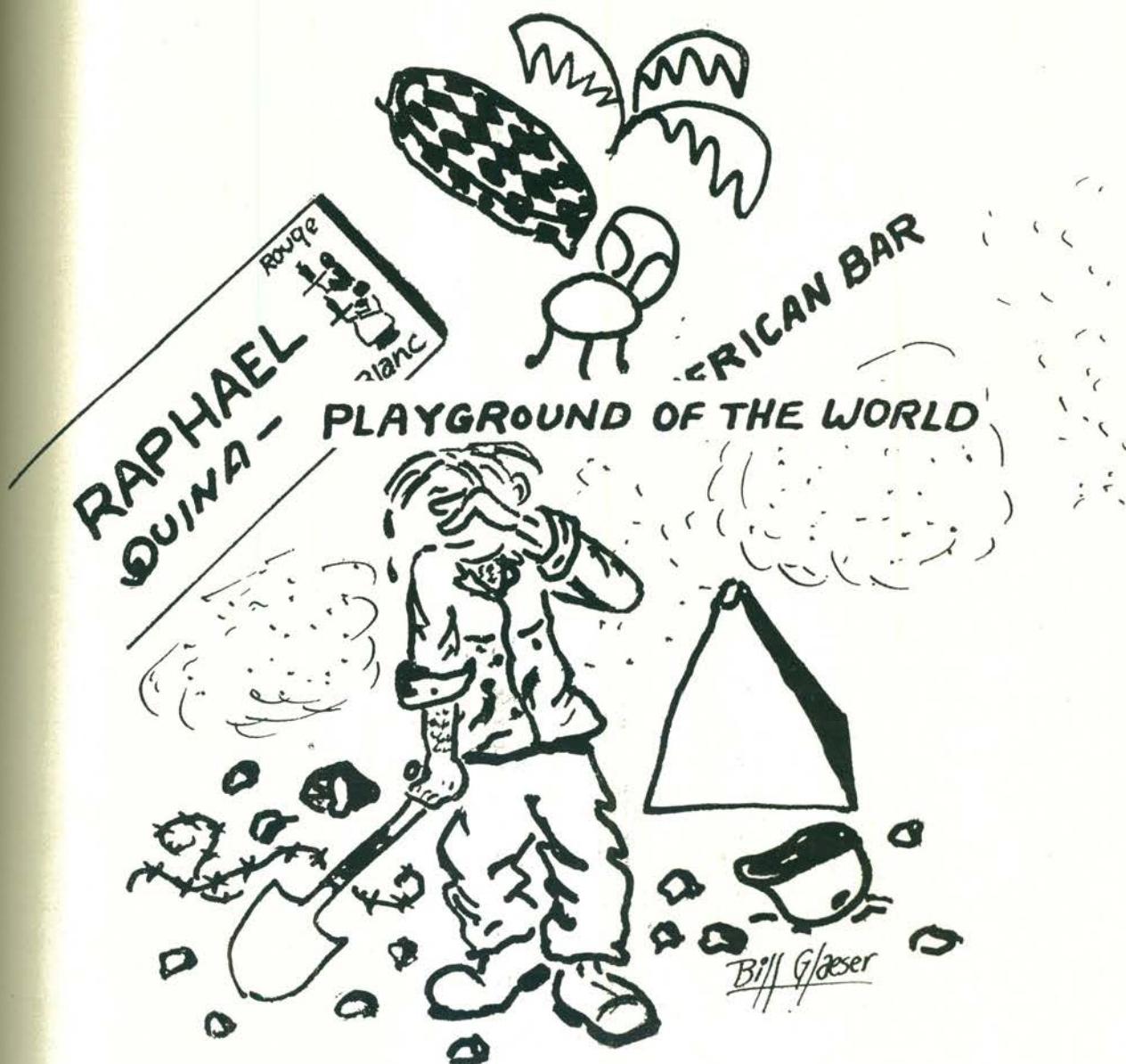
"Where did the Infantry go?" the driver asked.

"Everyone is turning up the road to Frejus. There doesn't seem to be much opposition there," the MP answered.

The jeep turned across the road leading to Frejus and climbed the hill to town. An Infantry mortar platoon was passing through and the people were waving wildly.

The operations men dropped from the jeep, thanked the driver, and headed down the hillside leading to St. Raphael.

The town was full of wire entanglements and there were dragons teeth on the corner, but the men met no opposition. They met Lieutenant Finnegan, Sergeant Gustafson and Sergeant Tschetters near the beach and combined to find a likely CP. The lieutenant led the men to the beach, approaching from the rear, Hotel Conspicuous, where they broke open the door and moved in.





Yellow and Green Beaches

The men searched the hotel briefly and decided that it was vacant. Lieutenant Finnegan told the men to hold the hotel, and he would bring up the Colonel.

Colonel Swift, Major Munson and Corporal Mattson had arrived at the Hotel Continental a few hundred yards away, in the meanwhile, and the CP was changed to the Continental. The companies were already moving toward town, and by noon, the 540th and the 48th had taken over the famous vacation town of St. Raphael.

D plus one was a happy day for the quaint vacation town of St. Raphael for Les Americans were back again. It didn't matter too much that the Americans were the tired, dusty men of the 48th, it just mattered that Les Americans were here and Le Boche was gone, and the watery beer was flowing and the Tri-color was flying in the square, and everyone was kissing everyone else on both cheeks, and Mon Dieu, it was tres bien!

Even now Les Americans were in the Hotel Continental and the Beau-Sejour drinking good champagne and singing lusty songs like they used to do in the happy days. They were kissing the pretty girls and giving the little children candy and chocolate. Ah, Les Americans had not changed. But with what noise they came! The big boats and the little ones making flashes and loud noises, and the airplanes zooming low over the church steeple, and the loud crashes from up in the mountains from the artillery, and then the big tanks—like mountains they were, and the little cars, and then the Americans.

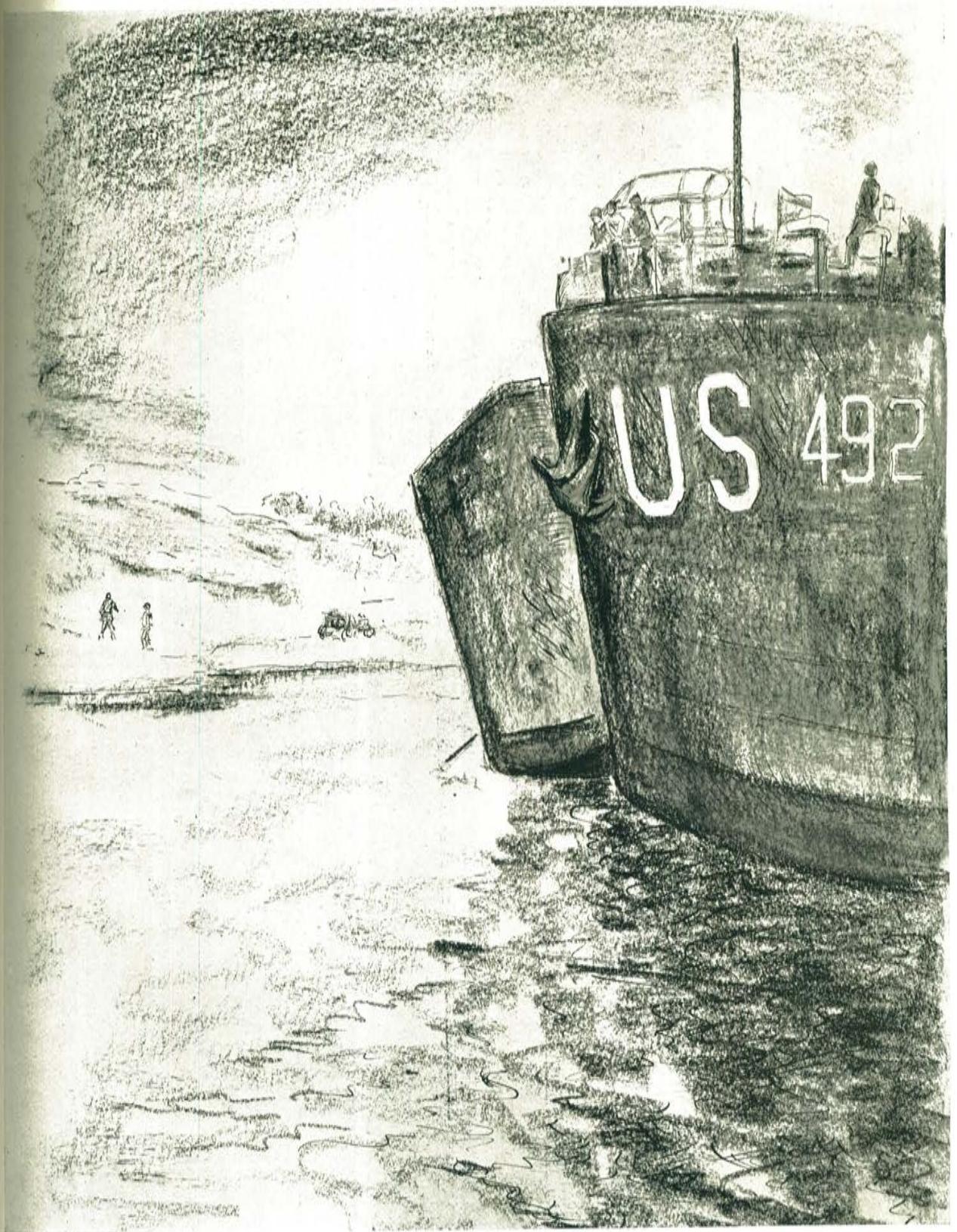
At first there were just a few soldiers. They would stick their heads around corners and then run like mad and poke their heads around another corner. Then there were more in little cars and walking. They came to the Hotel Continental and stayed and soon there was the sound of music and laughter.

Then they were out on the streets and there were toasts drunk at every house, and the pretty girls were arm-in-arm along the streets with them singing "Mademoiselle from Armentières" or "I'm going to buy a Paper Dollie" or "Roll out ze Barrel" or listening to somebody explain about Harry James or this Frank Sinatra person or this, what do you call it? Jitterbugging?

Ah, but it was wonderful. They took all of the wire out from the Boulevard Felix-Martin and we could stroll down under palm trees, then they went down on the beach and took the mines out near the American Bar and St. Raphael was like new. Ah, the white houses were still white, and the Boulevard still curved around the hills and the hotels were like new again. There were a few houses without roofs, but there was not many and what did it matter? We are free again and the Americans are here and it is Cest Le Guerre!

The Americans. We knew would come here. Always did they come here to St. Raphael. It is beautiful here. We call it the town of sunshine. Here everyone is happy. There is nothing to be sad about. Here is the beach. There are the bars, and on the cool nights, the orchestra comes out and we dance under the stars. There are the great restaurants and there are the fine hotels. Behind are the big hills to protect us and there is the ocean for sailing or swimming. Here we have everything almost everything but the Americans. And now even they are back. So it is a wonderful day, no?

Here you must stay. The war is almost over and here is a wonderful place to stay. Come to my house tonight, for I have been saving a rare bottle of champagne for this occasion. And bring friends and we will sing. I must find out what is happening in America. It has been so long.



Link In the Invasion Lifeline

Lieutenant Peternel, in charge of underwater demolition teams, finished his job by D plus one and reported to his company commander, Captain Snyder of Able Company. Captain Snyder was excited and worried. "I have millions of things to do and no equipment. It's still out there on those ships," the captain mourned. "Peternel, I want you to get my bulldozer and get it fast. I don't care if you have to see six generals and fifteen admirals. Get that thing here."

Lieutenant Peternel had been given a tough job. At first he thought the captain was unduly worried about a small little detail, but when he attempted to contact the Beach Group Officers, he found that he was one of a million officers trying to get things. The offices were a flurry of people running out and in and typewriters clashing and telephones ringing. The British were in charge of the ship, and Captain Snyder's urgently needed bulldozer was carefully wrapped in miles of red tape.

"This will never do," the lieutenant thought. "There must be another way." Lieutenant Peternel found out what ship the dozer was on and enlisted the aid of a young Naval lieutenant who had an equal flare for adventure and a kindred dislike for red tape. The two men decided to run the gauntlet of British wrath and get the bulldozer in to the beach on their own. The two officers, boarded an LST and headed out to sea where the transport was lying. Patrol boats started for them, and one pulled up alongside. A British voice demanded sharply for them to explain why they were riding around in the middle of the invasion fleet. Lieutenant Peternel explained the situation and was told that he would have to contact the British at Beach Group. Lieutenant Peternel said that he couldn't wait and that the war depended on the fact that he got the bulldozer in fast. The British patrol told them to proceed to the transport and wait there while the Patrol Commander went to their flagship to see the Admiral.

The two officers climbed aboard the transport and explained the situation to the captain. The hatches were opened, and the deck crane dropped down far into the hold of the giant transport. It brought out the first of Able Company's bulldozers and dropped it neatly in to the LST alongside. The crane dropped again into the vast hold and brought up the second bulldozer.

Meanwhile, the young naval lieutenant tapped Lieutenant Peternel's arm. Off in the distance, the patrol boat was hurrying to the LST with the British decision of whether they could move the bulldozers or not. Lieutenant Peternel got excited and tried to hurry the crane. He wanted to get out of there in a hurry. The patrol boat pulled alongside as the crane set the second bulldozer into the LST. The British patrol commander looked up at the LST angrily, and pulled away.

Lieutenant Peternel sat on a stump with Captain Snyder and watched the two bulldozers chewing away ground for an ammunition dump.

"Did you have much trouble getting them," the captain asked.

"There was a lot of red tape," the lieutenant replied.



Here Comes The Dozer

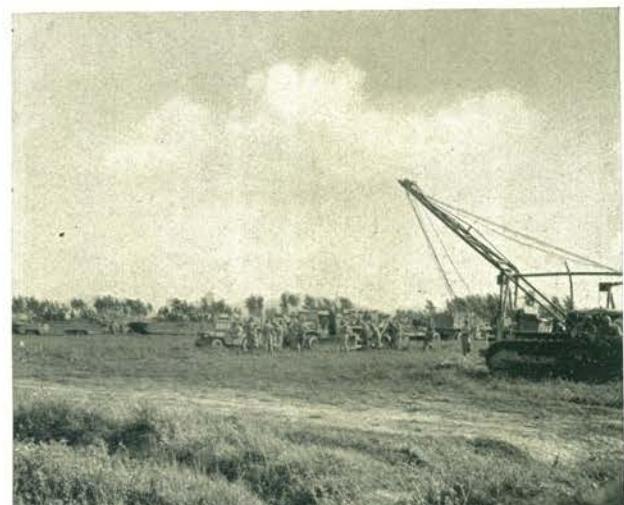
Sergeant Stern of Able Company found a map listing the locations of all minefields in the Yellow Beach area as well as pillboxes and gun positions for miles around. It was turned to the Yellow Beach Commander who said enthusiastically, "This map will cut my work in two. I can have this beach in operation in half the time we had estimated."

On the 17th, Able Company had deloused the docks at St. Raphael of mines, blown two pillboxes at the dump entrance, removed five tellermines, made the beach road two-way, removed obstacles and four electric flame-throwers, and reported that all streets in the town of St. Raphael were cleared of obstructions, rubble and wire entanglements. Baker Company reported that all beach roads were being worked, and that traffic circulation plans had been set up in the beach areas. Charlie Company made another entrance into the dump area and extended the Class V ammo dump.

There were endless reports of mines and booby traps in St. Raphael. At first, men of the Intelligence and Operations Sections went out to check them, but the reports came in so fast that a squad was brought in to trace down all rumors. More than twenty reports were taken in one day. One excited French woman returned to her home and reported that there was a big mine in her bed. The squad dashed out to neutralize it, and found a huge unexploded 8 inch naval shell lying gently in the woman's bed. It had dropped through without breaking the bed. The squad found everything from shrapnel to mole holes in front lawns, but there were no booby-traps.

The worst mined place was the airfield, which had been mined and obstructed in preparation for repelling an airborne landing. Able Company had been ordered to clear it and began work. Pfc. Gardner stepped on an S-mine while on the detail. Everyone hit the ground at the explosion. Pfc. Sorenson, seeing that Gardner was hit, jumped up and ran over to help him. Before reaching Gardner, he himself stepped on another mine. This one was a "Bouncing Betty" and shrapnel and pellets flew in all directions wounding several other men. The casualties were Pfc. Gardner, killed, and Pfc. Sorenson, Pfc. Melcher, Corporal Rydz, T/5 Heit, Corporal Chambers and Pfc. Stracener hospitalized.

Just a few days after the invasion of Southern France a few men with mine detectors from the 2nd platoon of Baker Company, under the leadership of Sergeant Maruskin were sent out to clear a mine field. Just around the corner at H&S Company they picked up a truck load of French soldiers and started out. It was a two hour ride out there but it was beautiful country and the men did not mind. When they finally arrived, they dismounted and started work. It soon became apparent that the use of mine detectors was impossible, because the terrain was too rocky, and too steep. The only type of mines found were German Stock." We soon discovered there was more to it than just clearing a path trough a mine field, we were doing it for a reason. It was on this hill that a group of about thirty French Commandos had struck at German installations just before Day. It was in the dead of night and due to the Stock mines and



Men and Equipment Come Ashore

trip wires, their losses had been terrific. There were thirteen men killed, and from all indications there were many more wounded. There was all sorts of equipment laying around for these commandos had been heavily armed. They had carried two knives, a pistol, a submachine gun, with ammo for both, a specially made pack carrying demolition, cap and fuses. We removed the mines without mishap as the trip wires were easily seen in the bright sun light. The odor of decaying flesh was strong and we worked feverishly to complete our task and leave. Just then far out at sea we heard a loud explosion, we looked up, and saw an American cruiser standing off shelling the city of Cannes. Suddenly we noticed a great geyser of smoke appear magically about 100 yards from the Cruiser. Immediately the cruiser turned tail and fled to safer waters. After that exhibition we returned to our work and it wasn't long before we had cleared the path. From there on, it was a job for the Frenchmen. They had brought along some mattress covers to put the bodies in."

But our stay in St. Raphael was short. On the 21st of August, the following field order was received, "One battalion of the 343rd Engineers will continue to support Sixth Corps pending arrival of the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion. Effective 0001B, 22 August, the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion is relieved from attachment to the 540th Engineer Combat Regiment and is attached to Sixth Corps".

On the 22nd, the 48th headed after the fast moving Task Force Butler and raced through the mountains to the Durancee River Plain.

The trip was memorable for the men of the 48th. We travelled more than a hundred miles through Southern France amid cheering crowds and gaily decorated towns.

We liked the French instantly. These people did not beg for candy, chocolate or cigarettes. They greeted us with genuine warmth. They were along the highways with basketfuls of apples, pears, grapes, hazel nuts, tomatoes and bottles of old vintage with glasses ready to serve us if we stopped. When we couldn't stop, they offered the whole bottle to us. They waved at us, threw kisses, and saluted us. Most of all they seemed anxious to touch us, as though they couldn't believe their eyes. The lovely girls of France, dressed in their gayest prints, waved happily to us. When we stopped momentarily in convoy, the girls would clamor over us and laugh and thrill at the slightest things we said. They decked our vehicles with flowers of all description.

But our happy ride was not without mishap. The French, in their enthusiasm, threw fruit high in the air as we passed. The men on the speeding trucks would snatch the tomatoes and apples at forty miles an hour. One happy girl arched a ripe tomato high in the air. Colonel Swift was looking at the girl instead of the tomato as Corporal Mattson speeded him along. The tomato splattered like shrapnel over the Colonel's face. But the Colonel took it happily and continued to wave at the passing towns with his helmet low over his forehead.

D plus Seven was a happy day for the 48th Engineers.



THE LOST PLATOON

The new assignment of the 48th was to open the way for the Supply route from Aspres to Grenoble, a distance of over fifty miles. Trucks were convoying through the twisting mountain trail all the way back to Sisteron and Manosque to supply the fast moving divisions above Grenoble.

Able Company began to tussle with a by-pass and a bridge at St. Julian, while Charlie Company worked their way up a lateral road towards Crest. During the night of 27th of August, a flash downpour caught Charlie Company with a bridge only partially completed. The swift mountain streams began to overflow their banks, and in a few hours, had destroyed most of Charlie Company's work. The company struggled throughout the day in an effort to control the flood, but finally decided to sweat out the cloudburst and wait until the water level subsided. The roads were covered with water in many places, and an alternate road had to be found. To add to Charlie Company's worries, enemy aircraft strafed working parties, but the next day the Air Corps had a fighter plane swinging slow lazy circles over Crest. When Jerry came down the valley again, there was a short rumpus and the American plane came out of the valley alone.

Back in Charlie Company's bivouac area, the men sleeping in pup tents saw their barracks bags and blankets actually start floating as a result of the downpour. Hail came down as big as a man's thumb nail. But the worst tragedy of all was the 85 gallons of moonshine beer that Sergeant Torigian had made for Charlie Company. The beer had been placed in a nearby river to cool while the company went out to work; then the rains came and the cloudburst sent the kegs of beer swirling down the river while the heart-broken men of Headquarters Platoon stood by helplessly. When Sergeant Torrigian came in from work he took off on a wet but disappointing recon down the river. Later in the day he finally recovered the beer about five miles down the stream. That night there was great rejoicing and celebration among the men of Charlie Company.

H&S Company, during the downpour, will never forget Sergeant Taylor their cook. Rain or no rain his men were going to be fed. With a life preserver belt around him, he continued preparing chow. Finally we heard him sing out his familiar serenade, "Come and get your garbage."

Meanwhile, many outfits were stalled for lack of gas; rations were short when they came, and many times they were out. The Army was showing the effects of the over-strained supply lines caused from the sudden, unexpected quick drive inland. The supply road twisting through the Alps from Aspres to Grenoble was no place to make time, for it rose and fell along the mountain sides and passed by mile-high cliffs and hairpin turns.

Late one afternoon, Major Clark, G-4 of the 45th Division, sent a message to the 48th that they would have to supply 16 trucks to transport the 157th Infantry Regiment to the vicinity of Crest. American troops were being hard pressed there and urgently needed reinforcements. Two companies of the 111th Engineers had already been committed as Infantry to stem the German attack. But they had been pretty well cut up. In fact the headquarters of the 111th Engineers had been captured.

At 1800 that night, we went to the 45th Division Gas Dump and loaded up. We drove with our lights on to the assembly area and there we formed a huge circle and waited for the rest of the convoy to form. We were told to try to grab some sleep as we'd probably need it before the night was over. They knew what they were talking about because we drove all that night. Finally, the rest of the trucks came and we moved out.



Along The MSR To Grenoble

We drove to a road that was seldom used and there we loaded up with men. There were so many men to one truck that they had to stand up. On a move such as we were making the ride became tiresome. We drove mostly blackout lights and some times we were told to put out our lights entirely. The road was mostly mountainous and it was pitch dark. The convoy traveled at such a rate of speed that a driver either kept up the pace or he held up the whole convoy. Some of the time we used our full headlights and we were very thankful that Jerry didn't have too many planes. We had a mile of trucks in our convoy and one could see the long line of vehicles winding along the road ahead.

When we came to an open stretch of road we picked up speed and ran through like we were running a gauntlet. Most of the time on the mountain trails the only guides that we had were the light colored side of the mountain and the empty blackness of space on the other side. There were bridges that were just wide enough for a truck to go over and tunnels that were pitch black. All these were obstacles that had to be surmounted in our drive.

The convoy commander told us where we were going when we started out but after we got going we didn't know what direction we were headed in or anything about what was up ahead of us. We drove for about six hours black-out and seldom stopped for a break because it was necessary to get the troops there fast. We arrived at our destination just outside of a town where we could hear the tanks firing. The place where we unloaded was a large field and we drove in and made a huge circle. There must have been about 150 trucks in the field and we were constantly wondering if Jerry might throw a few rounds in to see if he could hit something.

We traveled the same route back that we had used getting up and it didn't seem possible that we had travelled at a terrific rate of speed and in total blackout over the same places that we were cautious about going over now. It was morning now and the going was easier."

The only break in the railroad along the whole line was a blown bridge at St. Julian. If the bridge could be placed in operation, the railroad could well carry the supplies to Grenoble.

Although it was a little out of the 48th's line, the railroad bridge at St. Julian was assigned to the Battalion as a high priority job.

Two spans of the bridge had been dropped neatly off their abutments and now hung from the span to the river bed. French engineers had erected pilings to winch the spans back into place. The 48th planned to jack the bridge back on the abutment seats and place a wooden bent in the center, to carry the weight of the one span that had been blown out. Baker Company and elements of Able Company moved to the site immediately. A generator was rigged for night work as the men started construction.

At six o'clock the French quit. They had union hours, but not the 48th. Another fresh platoon came on to relieve the shift going off, and the lights were turned on as darkness settled. Trucks were maneuvered to the tracks, and the men worked constantly on the jacks. The second day one span had been reset, and the other span was being swung into position with the crane. Rock was piled into the box crib and around

the bent. At nine o'clock on the 31st, the engineers watched with anxiety as a locomotive with a string of empty box cars approached the bridge. The men held their breath as the train moved over the bent, and cheered as it gathered speed and moved down the track. The railroad was now open from Sisteron to Grenoble — a distance of 91 miles.



It was while at St. Julian that Able Company lost one of its best friends, a goat. The goat had been with them for better than twelve months.

Shortly after the 48th landed in Italy, Lieutenant Hollar and Sergeant Kobza of Able Company bought a lamb from one of the Italians who was tending his flock near an Able Company work site. At first, the lamb was intended for an addition to the Able Company standard menu of dehydrated eggs and potatoes, but the little lamb was so cute and playful, that the two men could not carry out their original harsh designs. The first night, the little lamb missed its companions so much that nearly all night long he cried. That ended Able Company's plans right there. We decided that the next time we passed the old work site we would take it back to the flock and give it to the Italian again.

"Meanwhile, we pitched a pup tent for him, but he kept eating the mosquito net. Sergeant Kobza finally dug the goat a foxhole, covered it with heavy paper, and put the little goat inside.

The little goat had already been named. From his futile efforts to defend himself against his tormentors, the men called him "Buck". It did not take the goat long to know that he had the entire company at his beck and call, but his special friend became T/5 Nelleny, and the goat would follow him around like a faithful dog.

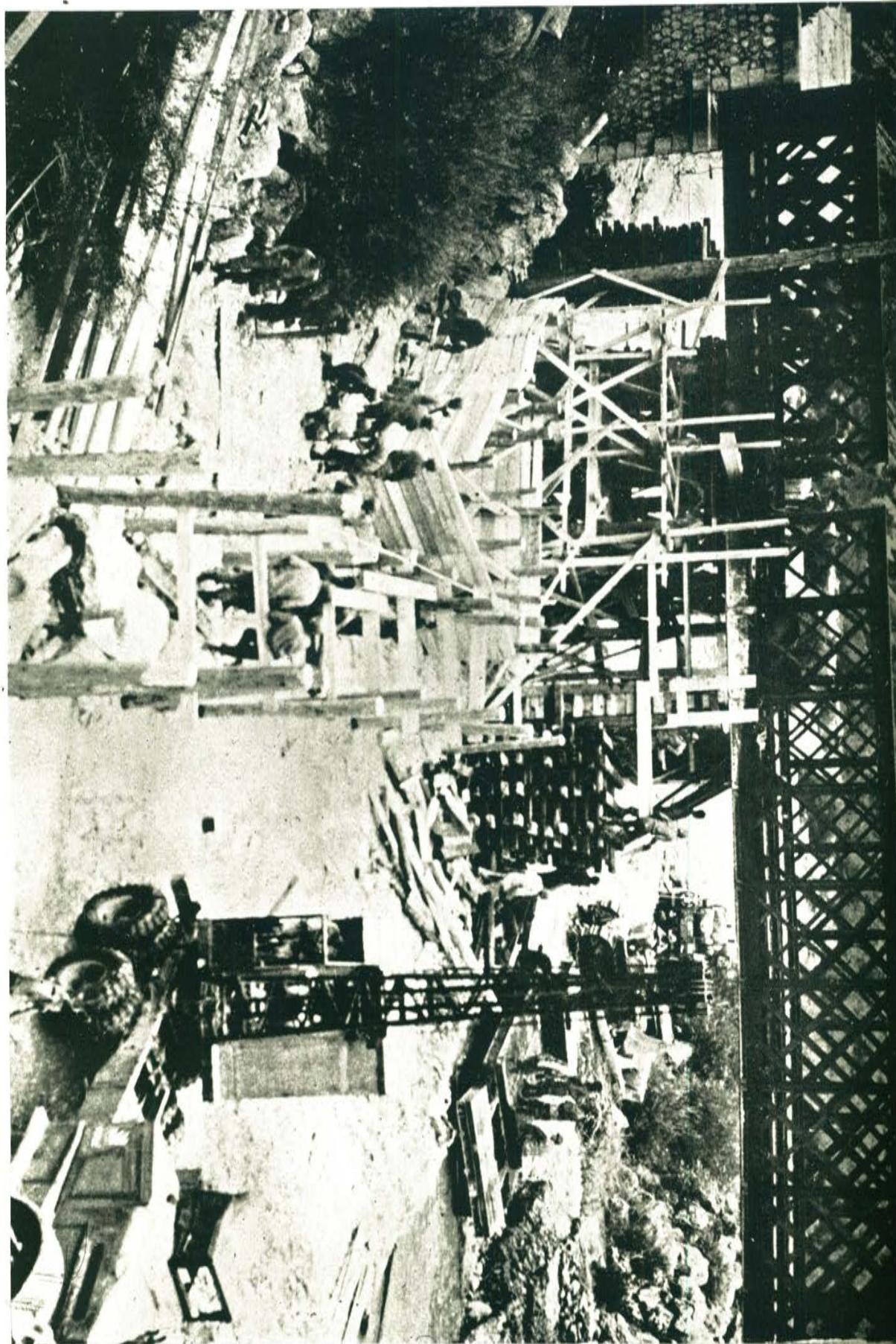
When the 48th moved into Mignano to build Highway 48, Buck came into his own. He went to the work sites many times with the men, and bore himself like a soldier through many shellings. He was promoted to T/5, by the authority of the Company Commander and he proudly wore his stripes on a jacket that the boys had made for him.

The whole company became very fond of him, but Buck remained faithful to the third platoon, for this was Nelleny's platoon. At every formation, he would take his place and stand at attention beside the platoon sergeant. Every now and then he would turn his head and inspect the ranks to make sure that the platoon was in order and remained at attention.

Buck, while at Mignano, became used to shellfire and learned very quickly where to be when the German heavies began to drop in the area. When the shells started coming in Buck would look cover just as the men did. He could find cover quickly and lie down as though he had been through basic training. He stayed near his own foxhole when there was any danger, and he would not hesitate to dive in at the first whistle of warning.

Buck soon learned the difference in shells. He knew which ones were going out by the sound, and he knew that a high pitched whistle meant that he should be on the ground or in the nearest hole in a hurry. One day, Buck was some distance from his own hole, standing with a group of men in Able Company's area. Suddenly everyone heard the whistle of an incoming shell and goat and men started instantly for cover. Nearby was a foxhole and Pfc. Clossen and the goat spotted it at the same time. The goat was a little faster and made the hole before Clossen. Clossen dropped to the ground as a German 170mm shell crunched into Able Company's bivouac area.

While at Mignano, the men of Able Company began to push Buck on the head to make him buck. They thought that this was a very clever trick, for Buck would rear up on his hind legs and charge, only to be scooped up into the arms of his tormentor. While he was small, there wasn't much that he could do, but he had an excellent memory, and many of the men who had tormented him, later regretted it. The sight of certain men was the signal for him to charge. There wasn't anything to do, but climb into a truck or tree and wait until Buck cooled off. You couldn't outrun him, and if you hit him you would have half a hundred Able Company men on your neck. When Buck was really angry, he would back off about twenty feet, hunch his shoulders and lunge straight at you. Buck weighed about seventy pounds in his prime, and it was a lot of force behind a pair of sharp horns that would be coming. A retreat was the best plan.



The R. R. Bridge At St. Julian

When the 48th moved back from Mignano, the days began to get warm and the sun came out after the dull winter of rain and snow. Able Company moved into pup tents, and Buck's greatest delight was to climb up on a pup tent and sun himself. It wasn't practical to try to chase him off. If you tried to discourage him, he might buck your tent down and tear it up. Then he would climb up on some other tent.

The men began to feed Buck candy, and he got so that he couldn't get enough of it. Whenever the men had PX or there was a package from home, Buck was always on hand to get his cut. If there were times when he was not invited, and the men were out to work, he would not wait to be asked. He would invade a tent and sample the wares. One day he ate up an entire fruitcake. There were some men in Able Company that would have gladly shot him at times.

He used to make a lot of the men angry by getting in their way when we had close order drill. When the company was marching along, he could keep in step and measure file with a soldierly eye, but when there was an order to execute a movement, he was always somewhere that he shouldn't be.

The mating season came during the beginning of summer, and Buck began to get restless. The men of Able Company were despondent, for Buck seemed to be angry at them all of the time. They decided that Buck needed a girl friend. He needed about a five day rest period, and then he could come back and be a soldier again. The men kept looking for a herd of sheep where he could take a vacation, and finally found a likely herd down near the water point. So one night, they bundled Buck into a jeep and took him down to the herd, and turned him loose. As with most of the "old goats", he wanted a young female. Buck spotted a lovely young sheep among the others and decided to use strategy. He started the entire herd milling, and had them moving in a tight circle as he started through them to the side of his lady-love. Just then an old Italian woman came running up to the men and told them to pull their goat out of the herd for she had just separated her sheep from the rams. But the men weren't paying too much attention to her. They were gazing spell-bound as Buck worked to the side of the pretty sheep. The old lady looked at the Engineers disgustedly and dashed out into the herd. She grabbed Buck's horns and pulled him out. Then she brought him over to the men and waved a finger in their faces. The baffled Engineers loaded Buck into the jeep and brought him back to camp.

When the 48th moved back to Salerno for invasion training, Buck came with Able Company. There was no Army Regulation governing goats on an invasion, so the men of Able Company reasoned that it was all right to bring him. They decided to put him in a crate and hide him on the back of a truck. The sailors on board ship found him, and it was not long until Buck was walking through the wardroom to receive the compliments of the Naval Officers and teetering on the deck to gaze in bewilderment at the ocean. Buck made the voyage without getting seasick and came in with the men on one of the early waves of the Invasion of Southern France. We believe that this is the first time that a goat has ever gone on an invasion.

Buck settled down into the environment of France. In fact, he settled too far. One day Able Company pitched camp in a meadow at the foot of some wooded hills in the vicinity of St. Julian. Buck spotted a herd of sheep moving slowly up the trail to the mountainside and the call of his own kind welled up inside of him. He started up the path a few steps and then looked back wistfully at the Able Company area and the group of men who were watching him. He would take a few more steps and look back, then walk a little further on. He little knew the argument that was going on below. Some of the men wanted to run up and get him. They could tie him up and wait until they would move away in a couple of days. Others standing below wanted Buck to go. He deserved to be with his own kind. Now he was full grown and his horns stretched twice in circles. He was a magnificent goat. Buck continued up the trail, and the men slowly broke up and started back to their work. Buck had gone back to his own.

No sooner had the work on the vital railroad bridge been completed than the 48th drew another large project—a floating bridge across the Rhone River. The 48th had bridged a lot of rivers—but never any like the Rhone—550 feet across at the narrowest point that the recon could find. VI Corps had debated all night whether to commit the bridging that had been carried so far, and had finally decided that the bridge was necessary. The companies rode all morning and reached the site by noon. Immediately all of the trucks in the Battalion were assigned to haul gravel for two long approaches that were necessary. Elements of all three companies began to inflate the rafts and float them into position against the swift current. By eight o'clock, on the morning of September 3rd, the southern abutment for the bridge had been constructed and twelve rafts were in position after a gruelling night of work, and a ride of over a hundred miles

during the day for the men. Fresh platoons came up in the morning to relieve the weary men and continued construction throughout the day. At night, the bridge was across and nearing completion, but it wasn't until one o'clock in the morning when the first traffic passed over the span. The 550 feet of bridging was completed in 37 hours, against an unusually swift current that had been swelled by heavy rainfall.

That same day while the ponton bridge was being constructed, Lieutenant Wamsley, assigned to recon roads as far as Lyon found the city outskirts with a recon armored car. The small party crossed into town as a bus load of Germans started toward them. The M-8 armored car that Lieutenant Wamsley was in opened fire with a fifty calibre machine gun and Lieutenant Wamsley and T/5 Wagner emptied their carbines into the bus. The tracers ripped into the front of the bus and the motor. There was a roar as the gas tank exploded and the bus burst into flames. Startled Germans poured out of the windows and raced for the protection of nearby buildings. Lieutenant Wamsley and the recon moved out of the street and attempted to find another entry into the city.

Meanwhile, Frenchmen were rounding up the Germans from house to house.

Later that morning, a detail was repairing a high suspension bridge over the Rhone when a Frenchmen approached and asked in perfect English if he had permission to take some German prisoners out on the bridge. The men wondered about the strange request, but told the Frenchman to go ahead. FFI, loaded to the teeth with captured German pistols and Burp guns walked a dozen Germans to the center of the span. There, under the startled gaze of the Engineers, they calmly lined up six Germans and even more calmly emptied their guns at them. As the Germans crumpled to the bridge the other prisoners were ordered to pick them up and heave them over the side. Then the other six were calmly shot and given the same treatment. It all happened so fast and efficiently, that the surprised men of the 48th hardly realized what was going on.

From Cremieu, where we pushed across the ponton bridge, Battalion Headquarters moved to Neuville then to La Pin near Lons La Saunier. At La Pin, Colonel Swift slept in a bed that King Henry the IVth had used.

It was soon after this that Colonel Swift was hospitalized as a result of illness and Major Foley took over temporary command of the Battalion.

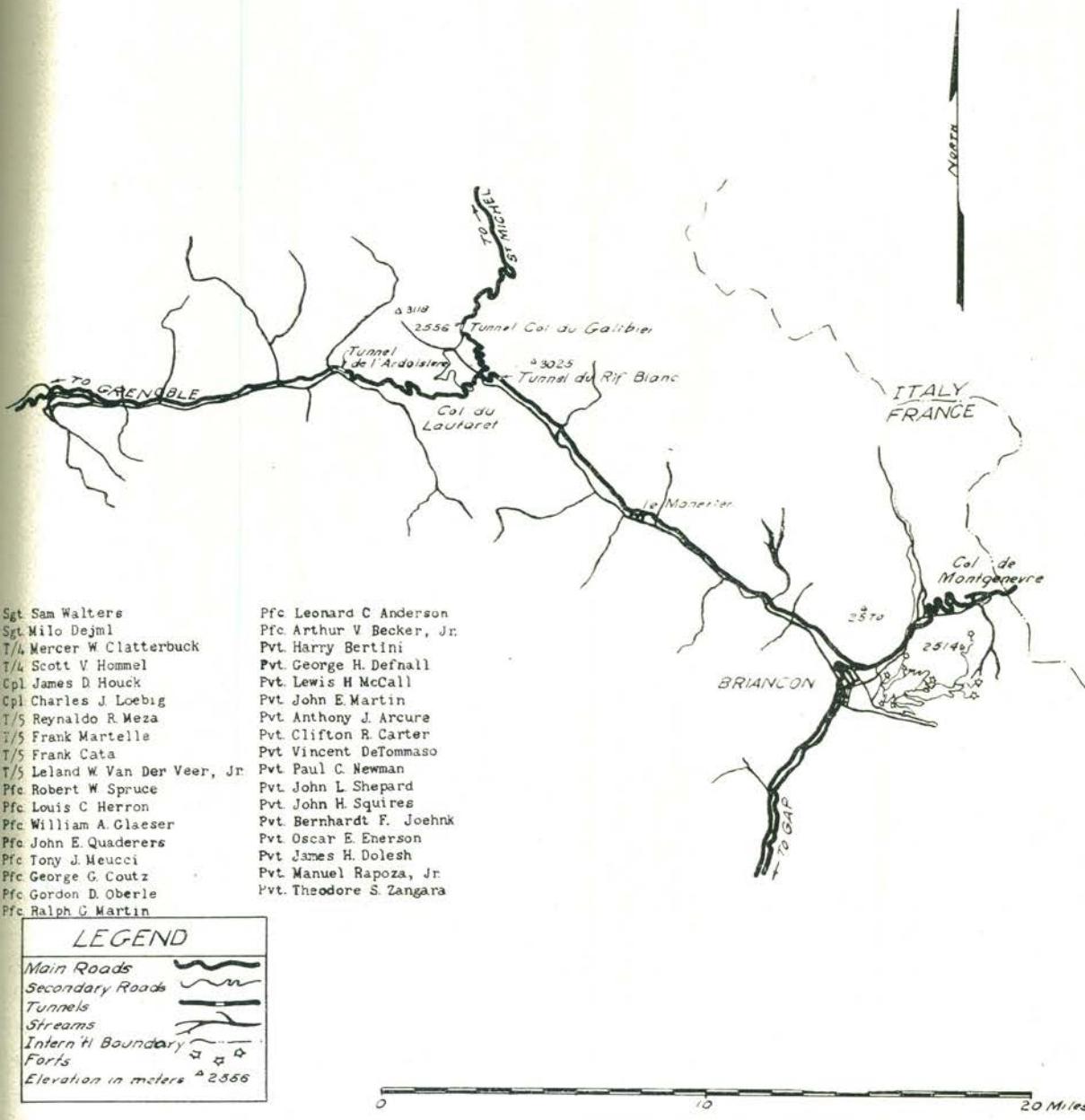
A string of bridges brought the 48th through Lons-La-Saunier still hot on the trail of the Germans. At one point, we passed through Infantry along the sides of the road. "It must be safe up there", called the footsore doughboys as the 48th rode by. "I guess so", answered the 48th who didn't know either.

Lieutenant Finnegan, Private Woodcox and Corporal Neylon were ranging far ahead reconnoitering the Main Supply Route as far as they could. On the 8th of September, they arrived on a rise of hills and found the Doubs River Valley spread out before them. Down the river about a mile, they could see the road bending toward a blown bridge. They attempted to move down the road, and had just turned into the approach when a German machine gun opened up on them. The Germans hit Neylon first and then hit Lieutenant Finnegan as he attempted to get Neylon into the jeep. Private Woodcox, working under fire, turned his jeep around, and helped Lieutenant Finnegan and Neylon to pile in. Then he contacted a unit aid station far down the road.

Engineer recon is a strange business and the men who practice it are a strange lot. The S-2 is like a large family. The officers are like Pfc's and the enlisted men like officers. They know their business and practice it daily. They are a fraternity from which the rest of the Battalion is excluded. They constantly worry each other and treat each other like enemies, but let an outsider intrude and he will find himself ranged against a solid rank of fire hardened experts. About the only compliment ever heard about the Recon Section members is that "they are good boys." This is the highest compliment among the reticent combat Engineers.



THE LOST PLATOON



Most of the 48th barreled right through the lovely French city of Grenoble, but the first platoon of Able Company took time off for a short visit to the Maritime Alps.

The platoon was attached to Colonel Bibo's holding force on August 27th. The rapid advance to Grenoble after the big battle at Montemarre had left a large number of Jerries in a funnel-shaped trap formed by two chains of the Alps mountains. The Americans far to the south were working well into the mouth of the tunnel, and the Bibo force was to plug the other end. Not only was this necessary but it was essential, because the American main supply route above Grenoble was perilously close to the roads the Jerries would cross if they broke out.

The Bibo Force wasn't large but it was considered that the force would hold and contain any attempt of the Germans to break out until more troops could be brought up to put the cork in tight.

The job of the first platoon of Able Company was to effect three major demolitions: tunnels at Col du Galiber and du rif Blanc, and a wooden trestle bridge at Articol.

Corporal "Doc" Boye, first platoon Medic of Able Company said, "The platoon arrived in three trucks prepared for any eventuality with a large amount of demolition, as well as ammunition and the usual engineering tools. Upon arriving, one squad went to work immediately, while the other two prepared a bivouac area. The road was mined and the tunnel at Col du Galiber was prepared for demolition. Then the blasting machine was turned over to men of the 83rd Chemical Battalion who were to blow the tunnel if the Germans started up the road to take Briancon from the rear. During the evening a conference was held at a near-by fort overlooking the enemy town of Articol, and Lieutenant Schaberl told us that the Commander's decision was to blow the bridge leading up to the fort the following morning.

On August 28th, Sergeant Clatterbuck and his squad left to contact an officer at the fort to blow the bridge. Lieutenant Schaberl and another squad left on a reconnaissance mission and the third squad was left in the bivouac area in reserve.

Sergeant Clatterbuck found men of the 83rd in the fort overlooking a long dip of road that led to the Alpine town of Articol. The bridge was located at the bottom of the hill and could be clearly seen from the fort. The Jerries could be plainly seen from the fort, too, for the squad counted thirty of them prowling through near the houses.

The men pulled the truck up to the fort and scrambled out as Sergeant Clatterbuck walked up to the entrance to contact the officer in charge. The Sergeant returned in a few minutes and the men clambered back on the truck. Pfc. Herron started to turn the truck around to head towards the bridge when there was the swish and thud of a mortar and a German machine gun opened up. The fire was so sudden and accurate that the men had barely enough time to fall off the truck to the ground before the bullets began to find the truck. A mortar shell hit the truck, but luckily the hundreds of pounds of demolition and mines did not explode.

The men crouched against the wall and ducked the fire that was passing over their heads and banging into the truck loaded with demolitions. They could not go forward around the fort, for they would walk right into the German field of fire. The fort was surrounded by a moat which led to the steep stone walls, so they could not get in the fort. Near-by was a sally port leading out. If the men could scale the wall, they could drop to the other side away from the fire and escape through the woods. But the top of the wall was being raked by German fire. Machine gun bullets were chipping the stone above the men's heads and a mortar shell hit the wall further along. But if the men stayed where they were the truck full of explosives might go up.

They decided to climb the wall. Private McCall started up and dropped over the other side. The next man started up and so on till the last member of the squad was over. Sergeant Clatterbuck waited until everyone was safely over, and then rolled over the top. The men paused to orient themselves and then started for Briancon. The road was being raked with fire, and the men reasoned that a German attack was in progress. It would only be a matter of time before the town would fall.

Sergeant Clatterbuck found Colonel Bibo in Briancon and reported for orders. He explained the situation at the fort to the colonel and the colonel ordered them to pick up the squad in reserve and try to blow up the bridge.

The squad found the reserves huddled in any available cover as 88 fire walked through their lines of pup tents. The men dashed for cover as the 88s zeroed in to give the bivouac a pounding. Pup tents sailed through the air and were shredded to rags as the artillery scattered their equipment and belongings. Sergeant

Dejml found Sergeant Clatterbuck in a lull in the shelling, and Clatterbuck told him the Colonel's orders. Dejml called to his squad and set out for the fort and the bridge, while Clatterbuck and his men started for Briancon. It was apparent that they could not stay in the bivouac. The Germans apparently had observation on the spot, and Briancon, itself, was being shelled. Clatterbuck did not want his squad left out in the open high in the mountains, out of communication with headquarters, if the Germans moved to outflank the town. Clatterbuck pulled up in town. The other troops were pulling out. Vehicle after vehicle passed the squad truck as Clatterbuck waited. He did not want to leave town without Dejml and his men with the last remaining truck. All of Sergeant Dejml's men came in except the sergeant and two men. Meanwhile the German shelling was getting more accurate. It was evident that Briancon could not be held. Almost all of the troops were through now.

The men from Dejml's squad reported that the squad had been split up under fire, and there was a strong possibility that Dejml and two of his men had been killed or captured. All of the American troops were out of town now, and the Germans would be coming in soon. Clatterbuck could not risk his men any longer. He ordered the men to pile on and the truck started down the road that the other vehicles had taken.

Several miles down the road, Colonel Bibo had ordered a defense line to stem the German advance, and the squad reported to him. There was no news of Sergeant Dejml and his two men, and the colonel had given Lieutenant Schaberl and his men up as lost. They had been sent out on a reconnaissance into an area that the Germans now totally controlled.

Colonel Bibo told the men that he was making his CP in a hotel further up the mountain, and told Clatterbuck to take the men to the hotel and get some rest.

Just as the men were about to move away, a lone jeep came up the road from the direction of Briancon. The Colonel dashed down to the road with his staff. The men of the 48th dashed around the jeep as Sergeant Dejml and his two men jumped out. They had been the last men out of Briancon, and had run a gauntlet of fire as the advancing Germans pursued them through the town and down the road. The colonel questioned the three men about Americans in the town. The men had seen none, and apparently all of the troops in town had gotten away safely, except for casualties caused by shellfire.

The 83rd Chemical Battalion in the fort had been engulfed with the initial speed of the German attack, and they had lost two officers and sixty men. Sergeant Dejml had gotten away but he had not been able to blow the bridge. There was still no word from Lieutenant Schaberl and the squad with him.

Meanwhile, back at the 48th CP, the men had heard of the German attack, and of the hurried retreat from Briancon. There were rumors of casualties, but there had been no word of the engineers. Colonel Darling of Sixth Corps Engineer Section could get no word. The engineers were presumed to be lost. Word spread that the entire platoon was lost.

Captain Snyder of Able Company was determined to find out. He and Lieutenant Conklin loaded up two jeeps with rifles, blankets, food and mail and started out by two different routes to try to get through the Germans in search of the platoon. After Lieutenant Conklin had gone thirty miles, he was stopped and turned back. The German attack had crossed the road from that point into Briancon. There was no word of the engineers and the men there were fighting to hold a road block out of contact with the rest of the force.

Captain Snyder moved along through empty countryside without a sign of Germans or Americans. According to his map, he was getting close to Briancon, but he could find no one. He did not know whether he was in German territory or American. He rounded a bend in time to see the platoon stretching mines across the road. The men were as surprised to see him as he was happy to find them.

The lost platoon was no longer lost. Lieutenant Schaberl had guided the squad truck through the attack by swinging wide through the mountains. The entire platoon had escaped without a casualty, except for a lot of personal belongings and pictures from home that the army could not replace.

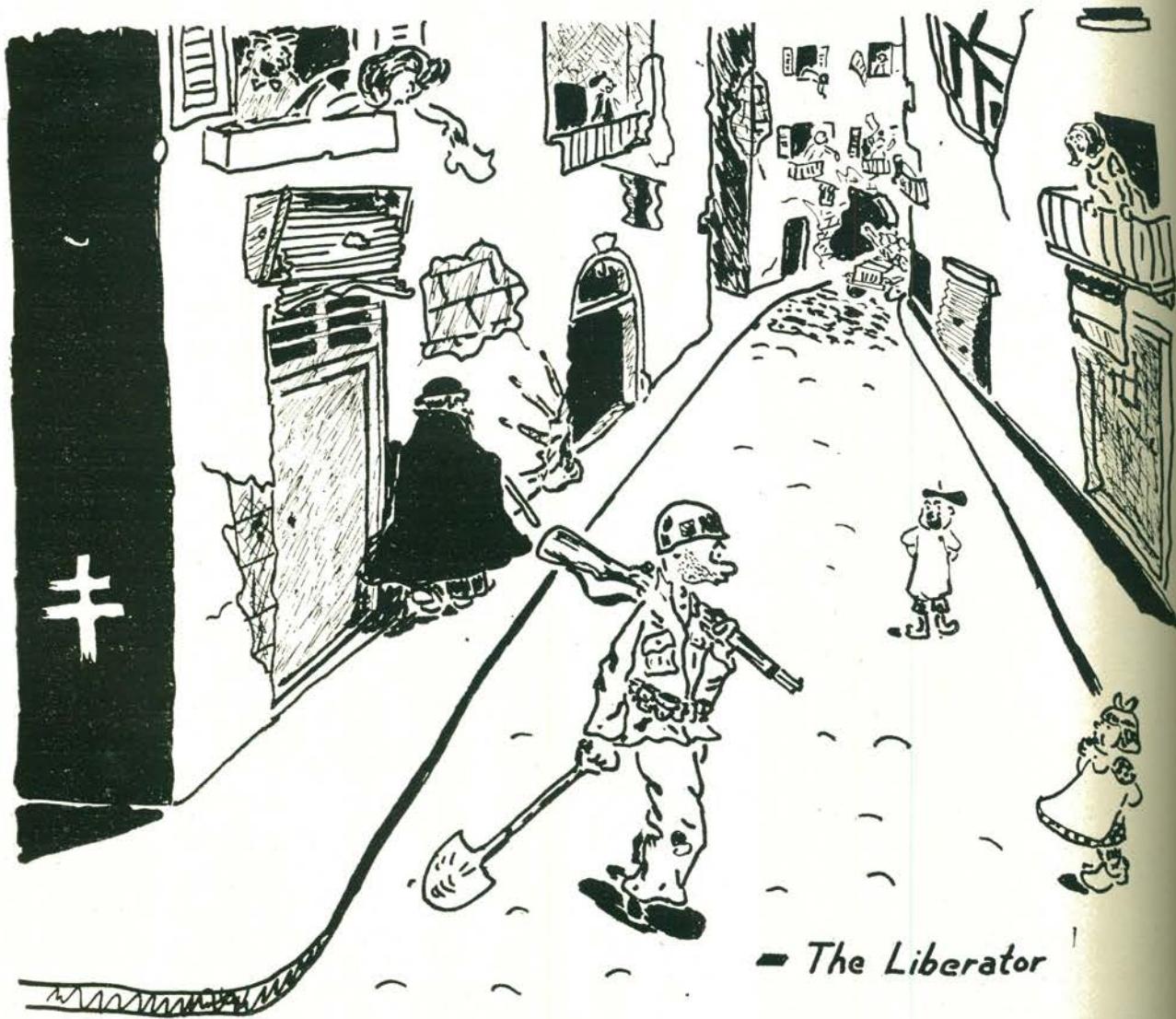
Baume-Les-Dames was a strange town when the 48th finally got their bridge in. It contained one of the greatest stories of French patriotism of the entire war; a story with an action finish that would rival a dime novel for thrills.

The town nestles beside the Doubs River, almost completely ringed by high hills not quite high enough to be called mountains. It was a pretty town, but its misfortune was to be astride the main road from Lyons leading north, and also to contain the only feasible valley for the railroad right of way for many miles around. The river, and the railroad and the main highway soon made it a prosperous communication town, but the

population did not change too much until the Germans came to France. Then it became one of the regional headquarters for security police who ventured in patrols from the town.

The French underground had received word that the Americans would arrive on the evening of September 8th. The FFI Chiefs passed among the men of the town and elected to strike that day. A German ammunition train was passing slowly through the town and the French methodically let it reach the outskirts and then blew it up. That was the signal for the underground to strike, and the small German Garrison force, caught unaware, was quickly rounded up. The French set up a position at the bridge to await the Americans and set another at the far end of the town.

The ammunition train explosion may have attracted the Germans or perhaps it was just circumstances, but at any rate, the French soon found themselves attempting to hold off a large force of Germans supported by a considerable amount of armor. The German force wheeled over the hill and approached the town from the North. At the same time, the long expected Americans crossed the hill from the South in the form of a couple of jeeps and an armored car of a recon outfit. The two forces saw each other about the same time. The Germans with their armor were moving down one side of the valley as the Americans with their light reconnaissance were moving down the other. The Germans immediately brought their tanks to bear and the Americans, having drawn some large caliber artillery fire, moved back up the hill to cover of the down grade on the other side. Meanwhile, the Germans, unopposed, moved into town and methodically began



rounding up the FFI who had only small arms with which to defend their positions. A German tank rushed to the bridge and wiped out the French machine gun post. German soldiers, in retribution for the uprising, began to burn the houses, and marched every man young and old, to the center square where they were going to teach the French a hard lesson.

Meanwhile, the American recon, hidden from the town and the Germans, were frantically radioing for tanks and armored support. After a short while, the tanks and artillery were on their way.

The Germans lined the 275 men of the town along the church wall in the center square and placed machine guns manned by German soldiers before them.

The American recon column, now greatly reinforced, moved down the road again into town. With a loud roar, the bridge across the river went up, followed by a second roar as one of the American tanks put a shell through the German tank guarding the approach to the bridge. The column raced unopposed to the foot of the hill as the artillery on the far side opened up. The Germans in the center square, caught in a bursting barrage abandoned their machine guns and raced for their tanks and trucks. Up the far hill they traveled, covered by a delaying fire of their tanks. At least three more of their tanks and several of their trucks were lost in the retreat.

The next morning, the 48th crossed above Able Company's Bailey Bridge past the shattered German tank that guarded the town. Within the town there was a mass funeral for thirty men of Baume-les-Dames who had died and a mass thanksgiving for the 275 men who had been saved from slaughter by the hair rising sudden appearance of the Americans.

While at Baume-les-Dames, the bodies of dead Ghoums that had been killed up ahead, floated down to the falls which was close to where we were bivouaced. Their bodies had begun decomposing and the expression on their faces was horrible; they must have been in the water for many hours. One of the Ghoums had been stripped of his clothes and shoes before being thrown into the river. Another Ghoul must have been shot while attempting to cross the river for he still had a wallet in his pocket.

The 48th continued to move through Western France, now in support of the Third Division. We were moving slower now. Jerry was giving ground grudgingly to the Third, and there were more bridges now. The Germans had more time to blow bridges and plan their withdrawal. Baker Company drew a tough fixed bridge at Villersexel, and Lieutenant Butler was nicked by shrapnel at Able Company's rough job at Lure. Charlie Company sweated out one above Lure, and the whole outfit waited for the Moselle River.

On September 21st at 2040, Captain Hayden, S-3 of the 10th Engineers phoned that the 48th would have the job over the Moselle. The type and span necessary were unknown. If the bridge now coming under attack was captured intact, no bridging would be necessary, but if it should be blown as was feared, the river would have to be bridged as soon as possible. The 48th went on instant alert, but at 2240, Captain Hayden called again to announce that the Infantry had just crossed the bridge and the 48th could dry their brows.

The Germans pulled a mean trick on Charlie Company while the outfit was at Luxeuil. Private Spampanato dug his shovel into a roadside gravel pile and detonated a booby-trapped mine. Spampanato was killed and five other men of his squad were hit by the flying shrapnel. The incident was passed eventually to Seventh Army Headquarters, where it was published and every engineer soldier in the ETO was warned of booby-trapped roadside gravel piles. Several trucks of Baker Company, pulling into their bivouac area, narrowly missed tellermines placed under cow manure about this time, too.



REMIREMONT

From Luxeuil the Battalion moved to Remiremont where Charlie Company finally did bridge the Moselle River. But it was not the fiery assault crossing that the 48th had expected. An enemy plane swept low over the bridge as Charlie Company was launching their pontons in the morning of September 29th, but there was no fire until 2230, when about 15 rounds of large caliber began to fall intermittently in to the water near the site and in a factory a hundred yards down from the far shore approach.

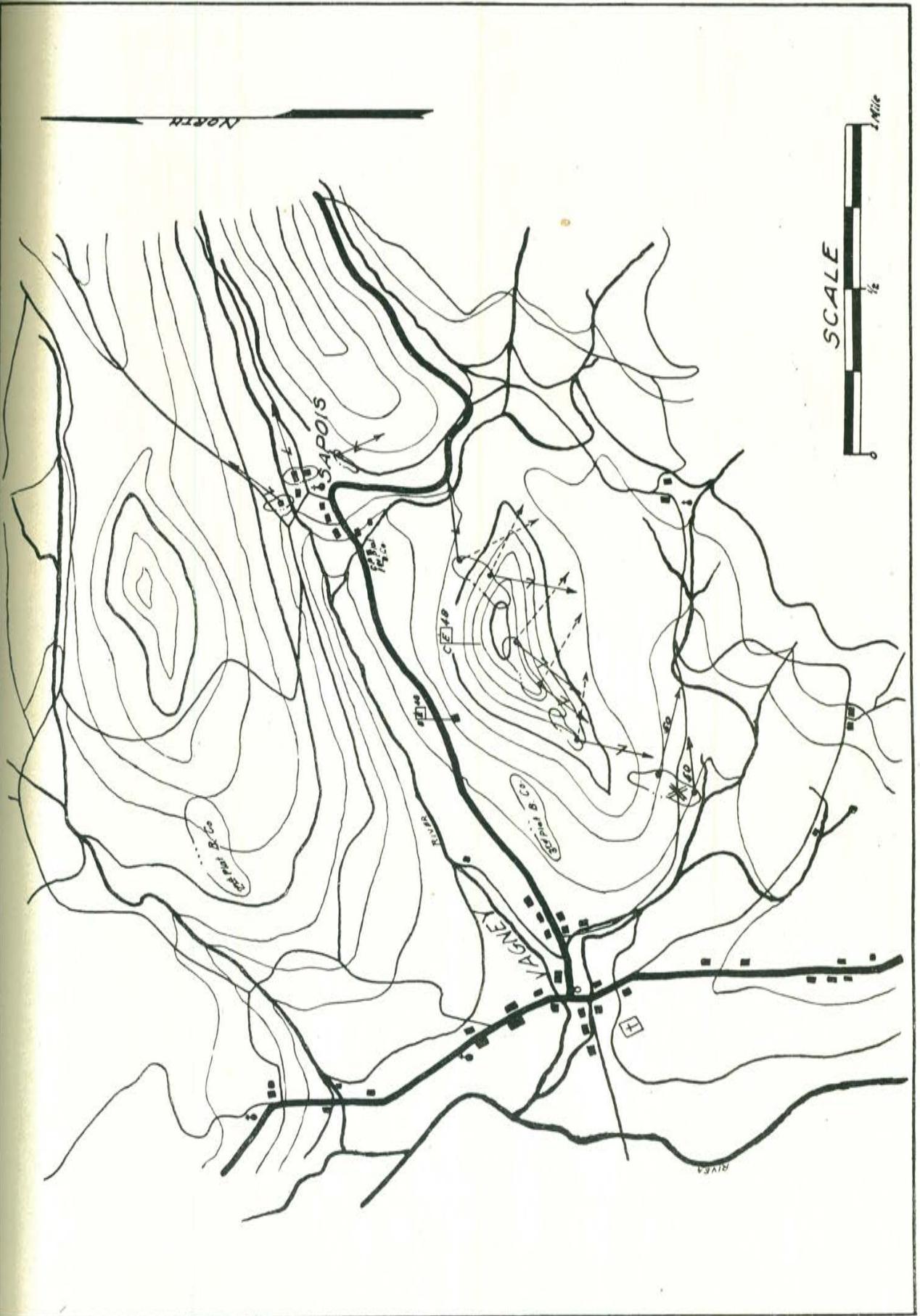
We turned in our assault bridging that day, and the life preservers that were on the Dukws attached to us. We wondered what was coming up next — — — The Rhine? That would be the big crossing. We were sure the 48th would be connected with it somehow.

It was getting chilly again and most of us were wondering if our second winter in Europe would be like that first one at Cassino. The front was slowing up. Jerry seemed like he was going to make a stand here, or maybe even try to push us back. He had a lot of artillery and didn't hesitate to toss a shell at any unwary engineer. Things were definitely at a standstill. The fast drives through France were over. Either we were building up, or about to get pushed back. Maybe we would spend the winter in Remiremont, which wasn't a bad town. There were two movies, a 48th shower and beaucoup de mademoiselles. It certainly had Mignano, San Pietro and San Vittore beat for bivouac spots. We waited and wondered what the outcome would be.

All along the route, the 48th had been placing route signs with the names of the towns to direct convoys along the main supply routes. By September 30th, more than 1156 signs of various types had been painted or were on order. A separate paintshop had been set up which included carpenters from the companies to make the signs, and with company sign painters and helpers to complete the job. The carpenter and paintshop was under the supervision of Captain Morris of VI Corps Headquarters and under the direction of S/Sgt. John Mailey of Baker Company.

VI Corps was beginning to feel the affects of the coming winter also. The carpentershop received a big order on September 30th. The shop was ordered to build a trailer for General Truscott, Commanding General of VI Corps. Mailey and his crew began work, under constant visits from rank in Corps Headquarters. The trailer idea spread throughout Corps and the news that the 48th had a carpenter shop spread almost as fast. In the weeks that followed, Mailey found himself in hot water that was beginning to boil. He had no less than fourteen deluxe cabinet-finish trailers on order, and thirty interested colonels inspecting the work. Sergeant Mailey's metabolism went down and his blood pressure went up. He wrote home and cancelled his War Bonds. He worried about whiskey cabinets and plywood and innerspring mattresses. He worried about what his girl would think and raved about armies and colonels and rank and the rising cost of vino. But he and his crew plugged along steadily and the trailers slowly took form. Soon most of the visiting colonels were satisfied.

One of the most important jobs of the 48th, in the vicinity of Remiremont, was road patrol. The 48th was to keep open a large road network which supplied the Corps from Luxeuil to the front above Remiremont. There were three arterial highways and many small routes that carried the burden of the Corps traffic, and the men of the 48th were required to travel long distances to keep constant reconnaissance and maintenance on the road network.



Almost every soldier overseas is familiar with the engineer patrol that keeps a constant watch on the supply roads. The patrol depends upon the size of the job, but an average patrol will consist of three squads. First comes the jeep with the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant. Following the jeep, the squads ride in their trucks until the job is reached. If there is a hole in the road, the officer and platoon sergeant will estimate the amount of work to be done. Then, one or two men will drop from one of the trucks, receive their orders, and begin work. Further down the road, there may be a stretch of road that has not been swept for mines. Two men will be told to begin sweeping at one point and walk to the next town or road junction. There the trucks will pick them up on the return trip. In this manner, the men are dropped off in small groups — two or three or four, until the end of the assignment is reached. Every place where the road needs sweeping or repair it is being worked simultaneously; there may be thirty men working on ten different jobs along a twenty mile stretch of road.

After waiting at the far end of the assignment, the jeep and empty trucks will turn around, and will stop along the route to pick up the men at their various jobs and bring them in for lunch. At each job, the officer and sergeant have a chance to look at the work and make their recommendations as to what should be done further in the afternoon.

Sometimes when the company bivouac is a long way off from where the men are working, the food is brought to them. Arrangements are made to meet at a town or a spot on the map, and the cooks turn navigators to bring the hot food to the men.

There is an hour or less for lunch, and then the men climb again into the trucks and move out to the assigned road. As the patrol reaches the work sites, the men who worked on them during the morning drop off, and begin work again. If the job has been finished during the morning, the men remain on the trucks, or else drop off to help some of their buddies with other jobs.



Starting for the mill

When the weather is warm and dry, a road patrol is an interesting assignment, for the work is not too hard, and there are interesting things to see and do while walking patrol along the road. But when it is snowing or wet, the patrol goes on anyway, and the men huddle in the back of the squad trucks as they speed along. Then, the holes are sloppy with mud and the passing convoys splatter water and mud over the working men. Often there is no place to get dry or warm, and the men wait patiently for the trucks to return and pick them up.

Maintenance is most necessary near the front where the roads have been recently taken. It is essential that they be swept for mines quickly, and that all debris be cleared so that supply traffic can pass. After a battle has passed over a road it is pock-marked with shell and mortar craters and is a litter of tangled and broken equipment. Often the roads are still under shellfire and there is a danger of mines and booby-traps and snipers that have been left behind.

The Engineers hurriedly begin work, for their job is urgent and it is essential that it be done quickly. Vehicles and dead horses are pulled out of the way, or shoved from the road by a bull-dozer. Ammunition and enemy arms are gathered up and tossed into a hole to be exploded with a TNT charge. Minesweepers go to work quickly, and other men prod potholes and shoulders for mines. The patrol works fast, and a minimum of traffic is held up. A good Engineer patrol can open a road quickly, and complete the sweeping of both sides of the road for mines in a short space of time. Road maintenance patrols lack the excitement of many engineer jobs but they are among the most important details of the combat engineers.

Remiremont was a happy town. The 48th was beginning to congratulate itself for finding such a wonderful place to hole up for the winter. There wasn't any high-priority work, nor were there too many jobs that the men had to sweat out. All in all, Remiremont was a wonderful place. It was a little too good to be true. "It wasn't like the 48th luck," the old timers said.

Major Foley returned from the Third Division with the bad news. He had just met with General McDaniel to discuss relief of Infantry and Engineer units holding the line on the right flank of the Third Division sector. Charlie Company of the 48th was ordered to relieve Company B of the 10th Engineers in an Infantry holding position. Baker Company of the 48th was ordered to move to St. Ame to act as division Infantry reserve. All road assignments and maintenance duties were passed to Able Company. Charlie Company moved into position at night and reported no contact with the enemy during the night of October 5th, although they received periodic harassing artillery fire.

Able Company continued to struggle with a regimental supply trail through the mountains near Eloyes in increasingly bad weather. Baker Company moved into Infantry position with Charlie Company. Charlie Company had patrols probe to the north, south, and east of their positions. Contact had been made with the Infantry to their left, but they failed to establish contact to their right, and there was still no contact with the enemy, so Charlie Company had considerably improved their positions by morning.

Baker Company received another job at 2115 on October 7th. They were to establish secondary roadblocks with elements of the 601st TDs. A German counter-attack was in progress, and the 601st and Baker Company were to hold and contain the attack if it broke through the first positions. Company B made contact with elements of the 7th Infantry and sat tight during the night. Meanwhile, Company C on the hilltop had finally contacted the 15th Infantry on their right.

The next morning Company C was pulled out of the frying pan into the fire. Although they had suffered no casualties during their Infantry stay on the hill, and had even managed to gain a little ground, they were more than anxious to get back to their own trade.

Company C congratulated themselves a bit too soon, for they were about to receive the most dangerous assignment they had worked on since Cassino, when they were ordered to reconnoiter and estimate material necessary for a wooden trestle bridge near the town of La Forge.

Captain Thames, Commanding Company C, reported that the bridge at La Forge consisted of two twenty foot stone arches. One of the arches was just slightly damaged by shellfire, but the other arch was completely destroyed. The bridge was under enemy self-propelled fire and could only be approached at night. The road leading to the bridge was in good condition, and had been opened for traffic, but it too, was under direct enemy observation from the heights above.

One platoon of Company C was released from their Infantry positions and prepared to begin work that night.

The first platoon made good time for about two hours, but the pneumatic drills began to spark, and at 2105, Lt. Connally, platoon leader, reported the first enemy artillery fire on the site. The platoon removed the handles from their picks, in order to muffle the noise, and sandbags were used to cover the steel to prevent sparking. Demolition charges were soon placed to clear off the pier and one span of the bridge. When they were detonated, they touched off a large enemy charge that had been buried in the pier. The entire pier collapsed, dropping the second span into the river, leaving a gap of sixty feet. This really let Jerry know that the platoon was there, and he began pumping shells at them at a steady pace.

In spite of the complete blackout, and enemy artillery fire, by morning the platoon had dug out the near shore abutment seat, cleaned off the center pier, and started the abutment seat on the far shore. A lot of necessary building material had been transported up during the night and one PW was taken at the site.

At 1400, the next day, the first platoon started to complete its task. No sooner had work begun, than five large caliber shells tore at them—one landing directly on the bridge, wounding one man. Again at 2000, nineteen large shells fell around the bridge-site.

On the twelfth, the platoon sent the following progress report on the bridge, "Pvt. Arno C. Lamb received a slight nick on the nose from shell fragments. Two men were bruised when knocked off the bridge by enemy artillery concussion." In the morning, while Charlie Company was holding an Infantry position the 10th Engineers tried to work on the bridge, but were shelled off. The job was turned over to Charlie Company again. They reported, "Ten rounds of enemy artillery fire fell within a radius of a hundred yards of the bridge from 0015 to 0410. Four or five rounds hit almost on the bridge, only forty to fifty feet away." After a 45 minute lull, the men tried to resume work at 0330, but shelling again started. The bridge was directly hit at 0415 after two close rounds at 0410.

Company C's platoons alternated the next day, but their luck didn't change any, although a lot of work was accomplished. Enemy artillery continued a steady harassing fire. At 1700, seven rounds fell, and beginning at 1930, shells fell intermittently during the night. Most of the shells were close, four or five in a twenty foot radius.

By morning the next day, the bridge was nearing completion. Three times during the day, the men attempting to place the side-rails, were immediately shelled off as soon as they approached. But the flooring was completed by 1230, and the bridge opened for traffic. The tired Engineers marked the lane for night traffic, and erected a sign reading, "Caution, Bridge Under Observed Enemy Artillery Fire."

Meanwhile Company B and the two platoons of Charlie Company being alternated on the bridge remained in their infantry positions near Vagney. They had established contact with the Infantry on both flanks, but had not been able to contact the enemy by patrols. On October 11th, a forward CP of H&S relieved the Third Battalion of the 7th Infantry at Vagney, and attached to the two companies of the 48th, were a battalion of 105mm, an antitank company, a company of tanks, a company of TDs, and a company of 4.2 chemical mortars. The Infantry battalion was completely relieved by 2100.

Although the 48th Engineers now looked like a special task force, and the men were beginning to wonder just what was next, whatever was next fizzled out. The next day, the two companies reverted back to engineer tasks around Remiremont.

The 48th was in the French zone now, so we paused at Memenil long enough to catch a lot of mine clearance work. Road patrols from all three companies found a total of 205 Riegel mines, 18 S-mines, and 18 Holz mines in five days of routine and dull road sweeping.

Now, it was November, and the Seventh was nudging its way slowly towards Bruyeres. There was a wooden trestle bridge at Haux and another at Prey, and there were endless road patrols and a few mines. It was cold and rainy, and there wasn't any wine left in the country-side.

One night it rained a little too hard. Silvestri, topkick of Company A was sent to check a report that the bridge at Docelles was about to wash out. The report was correct and Company A soon found itself buried in a muddy wet job—a temporary Bailey.

Company A arrived at the site at 0700, but the Dukws with the bridging didn't arrive until two hours later, for each Dukw had to be winched out of Company's bivouac area and helped down the muddy stretch of road leading to Docelles.

When the Germans retreated to the Vosges area, they were moving slowly enough to destroy all the important bridges leading to the mountain passes. VI Corps had dashed hurriedly through France, and

found itself without timber or bridge materials to rebuild the important spans. The French lumber mills in the VI Corps territory contained enough lumber for decking, but heavy timbers that would form the stringers were lacking. Captain Lee of Sixth Corps Engineer Section contacted Captain Van Campen of the 48th and asked if it was possible for him to supply a French mill in Remiremont with logs heavy enough to cut into stringers so that a stockpile of timber could be made. Captain Van Campen replied that he was a little doubtful of his ability as a logger, but thought it could be done.

Sergeant Linwood Tanner had been a former lumberman, and the Captain asked Sgt Tanner if he could break in a squad for the job. Sergeant Fritz and his squad arrived to fill out the detail from Baker Company.

The stretch of lumber was located on a mountainside with the mill in the valley below. The two sergeants found a house for the men and began the following morning to learn the rudiments of logging.

The squad carried a gasoline saw from their pioneer chest, and under Sergeant Tanner's direction, they began to fell the huge trees. A bulldozer dragged the trees from the spot where they fell to a dirt road. From there, they were placed on a twenty ton trailer and hauled to the mill.

Getting the big logs up on the trailer was a tough job. Finally a log ramp was made, and an R-4 bulldozer winched the logs up from the other side of the trailer.

The D-7 was then coupled to the front of the trailer and the logs were moved to the mill. At the mill, the logs were milled by French civilians who cut them to the required dimensions.

The French had union rates and hours. No matter how much the Americans impressed them that the logs were urgently needed they still poked along, so after six days, the loggers were much ahead of the mill. The French would fall out and take a long break every time a log passed through, and to them every other day seemed to be a holiday.



Loading up

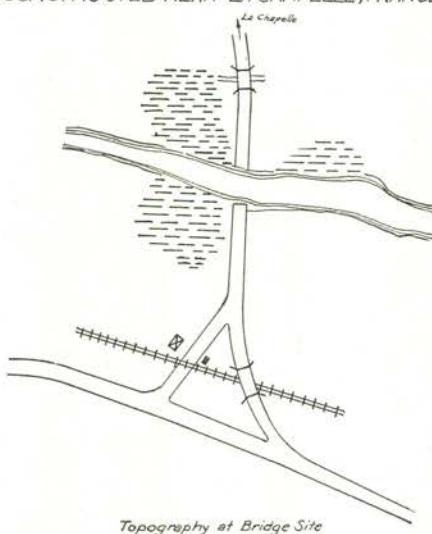
Private Joseph E. Palmer, writing in the "Beachhead News" about the logging operations, tells the troubles of the amateur loggers, "Don't get the happy idea that the work is without its element of danger—the foxy Krauts have been known to booby-trap the trees and plant mines in the paths leading to the timberland. And jostling big logs around—even in peaceful, back-home areas—brought its share of cuts, bruises, and smashed feet."

"Running the cats around on these mountains in this mud is a tough proposition but they really are the babies to do the job," said T/5. Robert Sheldon, who piloted one of the tractors, "but I admit this ain't the toughest spot I've been in during my overseas service."

The 48th's crew in the forest had as its straw boss Sergeant John Gustafson of Headquarters Company. Those working with "Gus" included: Pfc. William M. Gordon, T/4 Raymond D. Murphy, Sgt. Walter Fritz, Cpl. John Dean, Pfc. Ramon R. Juarez, Pfc. Richard Hack, Pfc. Cecil McCracken, Pvt. John E. Caverly, Pvt. Walter Ewell and Pvt. Edward Turner.

So if you sing that song about the dirt in engineer's ears, maybe you will understand why. They have more important stuff on their minds than a wash rag."

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTED NEAR LA CHAPELLE, FRANCE 13 NOV 1944



In the space of two weeks, the logging detail had enough rough timbers cut and hauled to the mill to supply the timber necessary for some time to come. Captain Van Campen wondered and worried about union rates and hours and the strange patriotism of the French for days on end. But the mill finally turned out the timbers when they were needed. In his report, Captain Van Campen recommended that in the future, the Army take over the mill.

Meanwhile, the 48th was having sign worries. Colonel Thomas, the Sixth Corps Engineer, liked signs. The Colonel did a lot of travelling himself, and he liked to have the name of a town so that he could orient himself on the map. He reasoned that supply convoys coming from the rear would do likewise. So almost every week the 48th would receive a large overlay showing the names of towns that would need signs. Many of the towns were on the front line or else still in German hands.

Sergeant Mailey would be given the overlay and his sign painters would begin work. When a town did not fall as scheduled, the 48th would be stuck with ten or twelve huge signs four by four feet. Every time

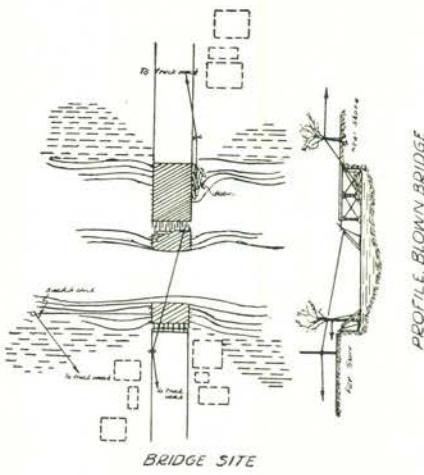
the company moved Sergeant Mailey requested an extra truck to haul the huge signs around. The detail was passed from Able Company to Baker, and finally ended with Charlie Company.

A weapons carrier with a sergeant or lieutenant would report to Operations and the detailed man would report, "I understand that the Stars and Stripes says 'Memenil fell last night'. Are the signs ready?" Or "The radio said last night that Julienrupt fell. Give me the signs for that town." The men would find the last overlay and see if the town was on it. If it was, the detail would report to Sergeant Mailey, who would fill their vehicle with the huge signs, offer them a hammer and some nails and send them on their way.

It became quite common in the Sixth Corps sector to see the huge black and white signs hanging from a shattered tree or the side of a battered wall, and the convoys had no excuse for getting lost.

One of the most lovable of all mascots adopted by the men of the 48th was SNAFU, a little brown and white puppy who toddled into Baker Company area one day. SNAFU was an insignificant little bundle of brown and white fur that could be tucked away in a combat shoe for the night. When he first joined Baker Company, no one in particular took care of him, and the result was that about ten men would bring

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTED AT DOCELLES, FRANCE 8, NOV. 1944



PROFILE, BRIDGE COMPLETED

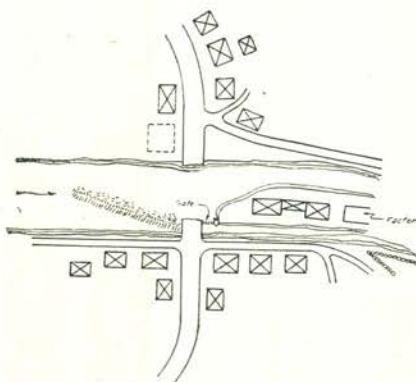
back messkits full of leftovers for him after every meal. That's how SNAFU got his first bad habit. Apparently he thought it was bad manners not to accept whatever was offered him, and as a result he was eating ten or fifteen complete meals a day. He could eat and eat, and never seem to be completely satisfied. After a few weeks of this treatment, he no longer played with his usual vigor. Instead, SNAFU preferred to lie in his shoe and sulk until he heard the rattle of messkits again. He grew round and fat and sleepy, and preferred to munch "C" ration biscuits all day to running on adventures with the men. Eventually, the men decided to solve the problem of SNAFU for his own welfare. Private Damron was elected to take care of him, and by common consent, the men agreed to resist bringing SNAFU anything to eat, no matter how cute he looked. Private Damron's treatment took inches off the waist line of SNAFU. He began to walk around the company area and explore the platoon bivouacs more often than before. It wasn't long until he had taken the entire bivouac over. Although a special bed was built for him, SNAFU ignored it. Regardless of rank, he would inspect the beds in the morning, and honor the owner of the most comfortable one.

with his presence for the rest of the day. This bothered some of the men at first, but after many hard experiences, he became a rather well-behaved dog.

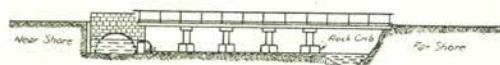
SNAFU had a distinct personality. He had a complete cycle of moods. For a long while he would be despondent and then he would break into a mischievous streak. He loved to hide socks and shoes, and these tricks would bring an avalanche of protests and curses in Private Damron's direction to teach that pup some manners. But SNAFU didn't mind the rebukes of his buddies in Baker Company. He was living life to the fullest.

SNAFU had the soul of an adventurer. Sometimes he would leave camp on mysterious excursions and would stay away for three or four days. When he would come back, he would be dirty and muddy and full of cuts and bruises. Baker Company could never find out the object of these short furloughs, but everyone was agreed that whatever it was, it really roughed him up.

FIXED BRIDGE CONSTRUCTED AT GRANGES, FRANCE 18 NOV. 1944



Bridge Site



Profile, Completed Bridge

One day, he disappeared again. This wasn't an unusual thing for him to do, but somehow the men felt uneasy about it. On his other trips, he would come back pretty well beaten. Perhaps this thing might really get him sometime. The men of Baker Company worried about him during the afternoon, and agreed to form a searching party after chow.

The men formed a line and moved out calling and whistling for him. There were no dog tracks on the new fallen snow and the men were at a loss as to where he had gone. But they continued up the mountain and down the other side until it became so dark that further search was considered useless.

It was almost two weeks later that the tragedy was discovered. He was found not over a quarter of a mile from the Baker Company bivouac, high in the mountains above Remiremont—frozen. No one could imagine what he was doing there or what he was searching for, but SNAFU had made his last attempt to beat what was mauling him.